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THE ATLATL OR SPEAR-THROWER

OF THE

ANCIENT MEXICANS.

BY

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WITH THREE PLATES.

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## EDITORIAL NOTE.

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ALL who have read Mrs. Nuttall's memoir on "An Ancient Mexican Head-dress," published as No. 1 of the Museum Papers in 1888, will be specially interested in this second number of her series of essays illustrating the life and customs of the ancient Mexicans. Mrs. Nuttall's knowledge of the Nahuatl language and her familiarity with the original sources of information relating to Mexico, together with her exceptional opportunities for investigation during several periods of residence in Mexico as well as in various European cities, give to all she writes the stamp of authority; while her painstaking and thoroughness of investigation are apparent upon every page. It is therefore with great satisfaction that this second essay is published by the Museum, and the statement made that it will soon be followed by another of the series.

The manuscript here printed was received from the author in the summer of 1890, and an abstract of the paper was read before the Anthropological Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at the Indianapolis Meeting on August 25, 1890, and is printed in the Proceedings of the Meeting. The drawings illustrating the present paper were made under the author's direction in Dresden, and are here reproduced by the photographic process.

F. W. PUTNAM,

CURATOR OF THE MUSEUM.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,

SEPTEMBER 24, 1890.

## THE ATLATL OR SPEAR-THROWER USED BY THE ANCIENT MEXICANS.

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My interest in the spear-thrower *per se* was first aroused by the perusal of Prof. Otis T. Mason's important monograph "On the Throwing-sticks in the National Museum," published in Part II of Smithsonian Report for 1884. Dr. Max Uhle's valuable contribution on the spear-throwers used by American tribes<sup>1</sup> directed my attention to the existence of the ancient Mexican atlatl, and thus gave the direct incentive to an investigation, begun in October, 1887, the results of which I now offer as a sequence to the above publications.<sup>2</sup>

As will be seen, the statements about the atlatl made by the best known modern authorities on Ancient Mexico, are scarcely of a nature to encourage research with any prospect of success. Thus Dr. E. B. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, 1873), after making the interesting observation that "the Aztec civilisation is the highest known to have used the spear-thrower, in reality a weapon of savagery," proceeds to state that "we do not hear of the atlatl being in practical use at the Conquest, when it had apparently fallen into disuse." Other writers, as we shall see, have expressed a similar opinion. Mr. Ad. F. Bandelier<sup>3</sup> went so far as to appear to doubt its existence and habitual use in warfare though he states that Prof. F. W. Putnam had identified the Mexican atlatl with the throwing-stick of the Aleutians.

<sup>1</sup> Ueber die Wurfhölzer der Indianer Amerikas, Dr. Max Uhle. Mittheilungen der Anthropol. Gesellschaft. Wien, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> As Dr. Max Uhle in a communication dated Nov. 3, 1887, informed me that he had then discovered or identified a number of representations of atlatl in the Mexican and Maya codices contained in Kingsborough's work, it is to be hoped that this able ethnologist has continued to study the atlatl, and will impart before long the results of his labor.

<sup>3</sup> Art of War and Warfare of Ancient Mexicans. Tenth annual report of the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, 1877, page 105, Note 37.

Mr. H. H. Bancroft<sup>1</sup> says that, although "some writers mention a ballesta, a sort of cross-bow, to launch the javelin, he had not found any description of its form or the manner of using it." This writer adds however: "it may be that this ballesta was a somewhat similar implement to that used by the Aleutians and Isthmians." Señor Orozco y Berra, the learned Mexican historian, frankly confessed that the structure of the atlatl was unknown to him.<sup>2</sup> His compatriot, Señor Alfredo Chavero, recognized, however, its use and even made an inference as to its construction, based on its known representations in the Vatican and Aubin Codices.<sup>3</sup> Professor Valentini<sup>4</sup> recognizes the existence of the atlatl and its use by the Indians in Mexico, but comments how surprising it is "that no express notice of it was taken by the chroniclers and especially that Cortes and Bernal Diaz, two experts in Mexican warfare and careful reporters, passed in absolute silence over the peculiar contrivance which they needs must have seen in the hands of their opponents and which, for various reasons, could not have failed to attract their notice."

After reading these statements I was surprised to find that there existed in the old Spanish Chronicles, a number of scattered notices establishing, beyond a doubt, the general use and important rôle performed by the atlatl at the time of the Conquest. The next step was to refer to several well-known pictures of the atlatl, contained in the Vatican, Telleriano-Remensis and Aubin Codices, authenticated as such by contemporary texts. Familiarity with these enabled me to recognize an unexpectedly large number of representations of the atlatl in other Codices and, what is more important, to identify it as the hitherto unknown weapon held by the sculptured warriors on the so-called Sacrificial Stone of Mexico and on bas-reliefs of Chichen-Itza, Yucatan. These carved representations, and the colored pictures in the Codices are so minutely and carefully executed and so clearly reveal both structure and method of use that they fully compensate for lack of detail concerning these points in the Spanish Chronicles. Indirect evidence and finally the Nahuatl text of Sahagun's invaluable Manuscript Historia, which I had occasion to study in Florence this winter,

<sup>1</sup> Native Races, vol. II, p. 410.

<sup>2</sup> Historia Antigua de Mexico, vol. I, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> Mexico á través de los Siglos, p. 615.

<sup>4</sup> Two Mexican Chalchihuites. Proceedings of the Am. Antiquarian Society, 1881.

contributed to reveal a complete view of the curious evolution of the spear-thrower in Ancient Mexico.

We seem to see the native huntsman using it, in its simple, primitive form, to launch the harpoon at the fish and aquatic fowl of his native lagoons or hurl it in savage warfare at his enemy. In numerous pictures we find it exhibiting elaborate decorations, curious conventional forms, and serving as a mark of chieftainship and priestly rank. We finally recognize ceremonial forms of the atlatl in the hands of Aztec deities and in the precious emblem borne aloft in certain religious processions. The following data prove, beyond a doubt, that the atlatl was in general use, in each of these forms, at the time of the Conquest, although it soon fell into disuse and became extinct.

To the Aztec mind the origin of the atlatl and spear was by no means shrouded in obscurity, but was accounted for by several myths and traditions. One of these is preserved in a Manuscript History written in Mexico in 1576.<sup>1</sup> The Nahuatl text relates that the Aztecs, during their migration, in the year 5 Cane, reached a locality which they subsequently named Atlacuihuayan in commemoration of the fact that whilst there, they invented the atlatl and yaomtl = war-arrow, or spear. The name Atlacuihuayan in this manuscript is ideographically expressed by the picture of an atlatl on which a dart rests. (See Pl. III, 6.) In the "Mexican Hieroglyphic Manuscript from the Boturini collection"<sup>2</sup> the same locality is designated by the rebus of a hand holding an atlatl. (See Pl. III, 26.)

Notwithstanding these seeming corroborations, there are strong reasons to believe that the localized invention of the atlatl had absolutely nothing to do with the origin of the name Atlacuihuayan. Indeed, the probability seems to be that this part of the tradition took its rise from the circumstance that an atlatl was occasionally painted as the hieroglyph of the town. But it could have been thus employed for its phonetic elements only. In other MSS.<sup>3</sup> we find the same name equally well expressed by a rebus consist-

<sup>1</sup> This MS. has been published in facsimile by J. Desportes, Paris. For further mention of this tradition see Duran, *Historia*, I, p. 31; Orozco y Berra, *op. cit.* I, 240; A. Chavero, *op. cit.* and others.

<sup>2</sup> Mexican Antiquities, Lord Kingsborough, vol. I.

<sup>3</sup> See Orozco y Berra, *Atlas to Historia* and Antonio Peñafiel: *Nombres Geográficos de Mexico*, Mexico, 1885.

ing of a jug from which water is overflowing.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, however, the above tradition merits respectful consideration and is of unusual importance and interest when compared with further testimony yielded by the pictorial accounts of the Aztec migration. In each of the MSS. mentioned above and in Padre Duran's Atlas the Aztecs are pictured as starting on their migration armed with bows and arrows only. Now, our tradition merely makes the plausible statement that when the Aztecs reached the Valley of Mexico and were forced to seek their food in the lagoons which abounded in fish and fowl, they naturally adopted the most practical instrument for aquatic chase. This was the atlatl and its inseparable adjunct the harpoon or spear.

A second tradition recorded by Padre Sahagun<sup>2</sup> relates that it was Opochtli — a simple mortal though called a god, who had invented the harpoon and taught its use to the Mexicans, as well as that of oars, fishing-nets and bird snares. His inventing the harpoon seems to explain why Opochtli was also Amimitl, for this name literally means: water-arrows = harpoons.

But the use of the spear in warfare was supposed to have been taught by Huitzilopochtli, the hero war-god. A well-known myth, to which I will revert, relates that he had come to life ready for warfare, "armed with a spear, an atlatl and a shield." A tradition, as recorded by Torquemada,<sup>3</sup> tells that it was this Indian Mars who incited the Mexicans to battle and had given them the weapons with which they fought, namely, the long spears made of cane stalks and tipped with obsidian, which they threw with a certain implement called "atlatl." It is noteworthy that, in the above

<sup>1</sup> This rebus has been analyzed as meaning "the place whence water is fetched."

That the first syllable of Atlacuihuayan is *ātl*, water, is proven by the fact that, in Carochi's Grammar, this name is printed with an accent on the first syllable.

This would connect Atlacuihuayan with the verb "atlacui" = to draw water from a well; and with the nouns, *atlacuihuani* = water-bucket, and *atlacui* = water-carrier.

In the invaluable old map of the City of Mexico, recently discovered in the University Library at Upsala, Sweden, I had occasion to note that the partially corrupted name Atlacubaya, written in Spanish text, is accompanied by a jug with overflowing water.

Buschmann (*Über Aztekische Ortsnamen*, p. 25), gives the original name of Tacubaya as *Atlahuacolayan* and refers to Bezerra Tauco as his authority. This name would signify "place of the winding brook." Topographical testimony seems to corroborate this etymology—for in the above map the town, represented as a group of houses and a steeped church, is painted as bounded on three sides by a winding stream which describes several unusually deep curves during its comparatively brief course.

<sup>2</sup> *Historia de las cosas de Nueva España*, lib. I, cap. XVII.

<sup>3</sup> *Monarquía Indiana*, Madrid, 1723.

traditions, absolutely no mention is made of the *maquauitl* or obsidian sword, or of the lance—nor are there any traditional accounts of their origin. Although these were in general use we are told by the high authority Herrera<sup>1</sup> that “the spear was the weapon most dreaded by the Spaniards.” Its use and deadly effect have, in fact, been recorded in at least a few words by each of the old Spanish chroniclers.

Cortes relates how the inhabitants of a certain village attacked his soldiers “*throwing many spears and arrows at them.*”<sup>2</sup>

Bernal Diaz mentions how, in the Spaniards’ first battle with the Tlaxcallans, the ground was strewn with innumerable spears (*varas*) all with two barbs. “These,” he adds, “could traverse any sort of armor and against them there were no means of protection.”<sup>3</sup>

The brave old soldier records later (p. 46), how “the Tlaxcallans had thrown, *with throwers*, spears armed with one or two barbs” and in describing what he saw in Montezuma’s arsenal (p. 67), he again mentions: “spears, some with two and some with one point, and *their throwers.*”

The Anonymous Conqueror<sup>4</sup> describes “spears thrown by a cross-bow *made of another piece of wood.* These spears were tipped with obsidian or with very sharp, strong fish bones. Some had three points and inflicted three wounds at once.”

Ixtlilxochitl terms the spear, *lanza arrojada*, whereas Padre Duran<sup>5</sup> names it *fisga* or *vara arrojada*, literally “spear which was thrown” and characterizes it as “a very dangerous weapon, because, on account of its barbed hooks like those of a harpoon, it cannot be removed without making a large wound — unless it can be taken out at the opposite side.”

Torquemada<sup>6</sup> states that a battle was usually opened by a volley of “spears *thrown* by means of a shuttle (*jugadera*), with great strength and velocity.” *Mendieta*<sup>7</sup> makes the same statement in the same words.

Padre Sahagun<sup>8</sup> distinctly mentions that “the instrument with which spears were thrown was called *atlall*.”

<sup>1</sup> Historia General, Madrid, 1601, vol. I, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Historia de Nueva España, ed. Lorenzana, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Historia Verdadera de la Conquista, Madrid, 1632, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Ed. Icazbalceta, Mexico, 1858, p. 372.

<sup>5</sup> Historia de las Indias, Mexico, 1867 and 1880, vol. I, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, II, 539.

<sup>7</sup> Historia Ecclesiastica, Mexico, 1870, p.

<sup>8</sup> Historia de Nueva España, lib. II, cap. 29.



Fray Diego de Landa<sup>1</sup> tells us that the inhabitants of Yucatan had learned the use of weapons and the art of warfare from the Mexicans and that they had "a certain way of throwing spears by means of a stick, about 3 fingers thick and 6 *palmos* (about 18 inches) long, which stick was perforated at one-third of its length and with it and certain cords, the Indians threw with strength and certain aim."

Finally Tezozomoc<sup>2</sup> in his graphic description of the military drill performed by the Tlatelulcan warriors preparatory to their rebellion against Mexican supremacy, specifies their use of "sticks hardened by fire" (*varas tostadas*) called *tlatzontectli*, and spears called *minacachalli*. The latter had three points, he says, and "were thrown by means of a stick nine inches long, called *atlatl*, which *atlatl* was the *thrower* = *arrojadero*, of the *minacachalli*."

Now Sahagun (*op. et loc. cit.*) distinctly states that the harpoon for killing fish invented by Opochtli was named *minacachalli*. It is interesting therefore to actually find Tezozomoc recording how the Tlatilulcans were ordered out in canoes, by their chief, to practise throwing their *minacachalli* at flying ducks preparatory to using them, in battle against their enemy. This double use for the harpoon or spear satisfactorily explains the somewhat puzzling use, recorded by Clavigero and after him by other writers<sup>3</sup> of a cord attached to the spear and fastened to the arm of the individual using it. Clavigero, who is by no means a first rate authority, but has enjoyed popularity, explains that the cord was used for pulling the spear out after inflicting a wound. Now in warfare a firm bond connecting a man with his wounded and infuriated foe would have obvious inconveniences, especially if the barbed spears were as difficult to remove as we have been told they were. On the other hand, in aquatic chase such a cord would fulfil the important and useful purpose of securing prey and preventing the loss of the harpoon. I am therefore inclined to agree with Señor Orozco y Berra who expressed his belief (*op. et loc. cit.*) that Clavigero was unconsciously referring to harpoons as used for killing fish and not as used in warfare, in the above passage which lacks, moreover, the support of other evidence.

<sup>1</sup> *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*, ed. Brasseur de Bourbourg, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Cronica Mexicana*, Mexico, 1878, p. 376.

<sup>3</sup> *Historia Antigua*, ed. Mora, Mexico, 1844, p. 217. *cf.* Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Hist. Nat. Civ.*, III, p. 594; H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races*, II, p. 410; A. Bandelier, *op. cit.* p. 105; and others.

Now the use by the ancient Mexican of an *amiento* or strap for the purpose of throwing the spear has been stated, in contradiction to the mass of evidence, by a few old Spanish writers whose words have been quoted by some modern authorities. In Molina's dictionary we actually find the word *atlail* translated by *amiento*, one of several Spanish words for *strap*. Only a prolonged search has enabled me to find the explanation of the strikingly inappropriate use of the term "strap" for a wooden throwing-stick. The explanation is as follows: and though it may seem, as I hope it will, very simple and evident, I can affirm that it was most difficult and perplexing to find.

I have already stated that Bernal Diaz mentioned spears which the Indians "threw with throwers." He uses the expression *tirar con tiraderas* and it is evident that by *tiradera* he merely meant to express the verbal noun of the verb *tirar* which he used immediately before, to describe the action. He employed the expression *tirar con tiradera* in precisely the same way and with the same signification as Torquemada and Tezozomoc respectively wrote, *jugar con jugadera* and *arrojar . . . con arrojadera*. Each of these old Spanish contemporaries thus described in synonymous verbs and verbal nouns the action, to throw (a spear) with a thrower.

Now the word *jugadera*, from its original meaning of "thrower" has come to be the specific name for a certain kind of "thrower:" a shuttle. The word *tiradera*, though it simply meant "thrower" and was employed in this sense, as will be shown further on, by others than Bernal Diaz, was also, used by some old writers for the thing thrown, namely, the spear, sometimes termed "vara arrojadiça." *Tiradera*, however, also meant *strap* and was therefore synonymous with *amiento*, the more general term for strap, though its application is usually limited to that strap used to fasten the helmet under the chin.

The chronicler and compiler *Herrera*, who, I believe, never left Spain, but is known to have consulted the MS. History of the Conquest written by Bernal Diaz, evidently came across the word *tiradera* and, having no practical knowledge of Mexican spears and their throwers, inferred that a *tiradera* was an *amiento*. And thus we find him recording<sup>1</sup> that the same Tlaxcallans whom Bernal Diaz had seen, "carried spears with *amientos* which they threw with such force as to cleave a door."

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* Dec. II., lib. VI, cap. VI.

Having once been admitted and employed in connection with Mexican spears, the word *amiento*, the false substitute for *tiradera*, asserted itself and with the recognized vitality and success of errors found its way into a series of books. But its falsity and absolute inappropriateness are often evident. Just see, for instance, how the writer of the Italian text to the Vatican Codex<sup>1</sup> retains this Spanish word and, in describing the picture of a warrior on Pl. LXXXI, says: "that which is held in the right hand is an *amiento* [*strap!*] made of wood, with which they throw a spear with great force." The English translator of the same text<sup>2</sup> rather cleverly translated this as a *kind of wooden sling*. On referring to the picture we find a substantial, well-drawn atlatl in the warrior's hand (Pl. III, 16).

Again notice how Padre Duran's use of the word is proven to be wrong by his own illustration. He relates that "a certain image . . . held, with a threatening gesture, a spear which was set in an *amiento*." Examining the picture of this image in his Atlas we find the spear, not set into a strap but distinctly lying on an atlatl of well-known form, made of a recurved piece of wood provided with lateral finger-pegs.

The Aztec word atlatl or atlatli, as it is sometimes found written, is intimately connected with the verb *tlaça* = to aim, to throw or cast (Spanish: *tirar*), the frequentative of which is *tlatlaça*.

From this verb a whole series of words is formed:

*tlatlaçaliztli* = the act of throwing, etc.

*tlatlaçalli*  
 or *tlatlaxtli* } the object thrown.  
*tlatlaztli*  
*tlatlaçani* = the thrower.

Now we also find the verbs *atlauiā* and *atlacopa* or *atlatica nītl-amīna*, meaning: to throw a dart with an atlatl.

Considering that the original use of the atlatl was in aquatic chase by the *atlatl* or fishermen, whose name is a synthesis of *atl* = water and *tlacatl* = men, I venture the suggestion that the word atlatl may primarily have been a synthesis formed with the verbal noun *tlatlaçani* = thrower and *âtl* = water. This would give the word *atlatlaçani*, meaning "water-thrower," not an unfit name for

<sup>1</sup> Lord Kingsborough, Mexican Antiquities, vol. v.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Kingsborough, Mexican Antiquities, vol. vi.

the harpoon-thrower of the water-men. However, this is, as I said, a suggestion only, and I refer the question of the exact derivation of "atlatl" to the consideration of Mexican philologists.

Let us now review the scattered testimony I have brought together from the writings of the highest authorities on Ancient Mexico. It proves beyond a doubt, that the spear, thrown by a wooden atlatl, was not only in general use at the time of the Conquest, but was acknowledged by the Spaniards to have been the most effectual weapon of the Aztecs.

These, it seems, had only adopted it and acquired proficiency in its use from the time they took up their abode in the Valley of Mexico where they found themselves forced to resort to aquatic chase. Up to that time their chief arm had been the bow and arrow just as, at the time of the Conquest, it was that of the Chichimecs, of the Mountain Indians and of those tribes that dwelt inland and hunted chiefly birds and small game.<sup>1</sup>

Doubtless the people inhabiting the coast regions originally used the harpoon for fishing and occasionally in savage warfare, just as the Aztecs did. But this tribe of fierce warriors and conquerors seems to have been the first to create a purely military and a ceremonial form of atlatl.

What the Mexican spear-thrower was like when it had reached its utmost development can best be learnt by examination of its numerous representations in sculpture and in the Codices, the majority of which are contained in Lord Kingsborough's monumental work, for the three specimens of genuine Ancient Mexican atlatl preserved respectively in Rome, Berlin and London, and to which I shall refer more particularly, are comparatively simple and incomplete.

A first glance at the strange and complex figures on Plates II and III may somewhat nonplus the beholder. When he observes their variety and actually finds that there are no two specimens exactly alike, even among many taken from the same Codex, he may well be tempted to inquire: how can one determine that these are all atlatl? It is a fortunate circumstance that, when a native

<sup>1</sup> "The Chichimecs . . . were always armed with bow and arrow so as to be always ready to hunt," Sah., *op. cit.* lib. x, cap. XXIX; *cf.* Bernal Diaz, *op. cit.* p. 74. The bow and arrow is also recorded as the principal arm of the inhabitants of Michoacan, Orozco y Berra, *op. cit.* II, pp. 589, 594.

artist pictured a warrior or deity with an atlatl in one hand, he generally painted one or more spears, a shield and a banner in the other. These together constituted the complete accoutrement of one grade of war-chiefs. Now it sometimes happened that he omitted one or the other of these; but, as will be seen by referring to my index to Plates II and III it is an exceptional case when an atlatl is not accompanied by some other part of military armor.

In cases of doubtful looking atlatl the presence of the spear, as an accessory, may be adopted as a convincing proof of a correct identification. On the other hand, the absence of the spear does not constitute disproof. Indeed had I excluded all atlatl pictured without accessory spears, from my illustrations, I should have been obliged, strange to say, to reject some of the most important representations of atlatl we have; important because of the few whose authenticity is established by the contemporary texts of the Codices containing them.

On Plate 32 of the Vatican Codex A a personage is painted with what the text terms a "blue atlatl" in his right hand (Pl. III, 1). His left hand is empty and he is not in strictly military costume.

On Plates 81 and 82 of the same Codex, war-chiefs are pictured holding an atlatl (Pl. III, 16 and 17) in one hand and a shield and banner only in the other. I have already quoted the text describing one of these atlatl as "a kind of wooden sling." These cases prove that a genuine picture of an atlatl is not invariably accompanied by a spear or even by other parts of military armor.

Let us examine the few other atlatl identified as such by contemporary texts.

Pl. III, 2, from the Vatican Codex A, is described as "a certain sort of arm as a bow;" 22, from the same source is termed "a certain weapon which they name Xiutlatli (literally "blue atlatl"); 10 is merely named "Xiuhatlatli" in the text to the Telleriano-Remensis Codex. Leaving these "described and labelled" specimens let us pass on to those for whose identification, with one or two exceptions, I alone am responsible.

I have endeavored to classify my collection of atlatl and divided them into two classes.

*Class I* answers to Fray Diego de Landa's description being usually provided with one or more finger holes at about one-third of its length. It includes:

1, atlatl with a single large circular finger hole. *Type specimens*, Pl. II, 1 and 20.

1a, ? atlatl with a double hole. *Unique specimen*, Pl. II, 9.

2, atlatl with two small holes in the body of the implement. *Type specimens*, Pl. I, 4, and Pl. II, 15.

2a ?, atlatl with three holes in the body of the implement. *Unique specimen*, Pl. II, 16.

3, atlatl with two lateral rings attached externally. *Type specimens*, Pl. II, 6, and 3, b; also the three existing specimens of atlatl.

*Class II* is distinguished by being provided with lateral finger pegs placed exactly opposite to each other instead of holes or rings. *Type specimens*, Pl. III, 26, 30-33; cf. 16 and 17.

Let us take a rapid survey of *Class I*.

1. In the hands of sculptured warriors, Pl. I, 1 to 5, 6b.

2. In groups of armor also carved in bas-relief, Pl. II, 3a, 3b, 6, also Pl. I, 6a.

3. In the Codices, Pl. II, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 20-27. In this series we can first study the atlatl by itself (Pl. II, 3a, 3b; I, 6 and 6a), then learn by ocular demonstration how the index and middle fingers were inserted into the hole or holes whilst the other fingers and thumb grasped the handle.

We have front views, Pl. I, 2, 3, 6b; II, 14, 15, 16, and back views, Pl. I, 5; II, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7-12, 17, of the hand and inserted fingers holding the atlatl ready for use.

We see it also simply grasped by its handle, Pl. I, 4; II, 21-27, and finally have its instantaneous though distorted picture in the very act of launching the spear, Pl. II, 18, 19 and 20.

We perceive that it sometimes is ornamented with a flat covering of applied feather-work, Pl. I, 1-6b; II, 2, 3b, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 22-25, 27, covered with tiger skin, Pl. II, 4 and 5, carved or painted with transverse bars, Pl. II, 1, 21, 26, adorned with tufts of feathers, Pl. II, 21, 23, 24 and 27, flexible tassel-like appendages, Pl. II, 7, 16, or long streamers, Pl. II, 9, 12. We observe that the atlatl itself is generally painted blue while the decoration is of many colors.

Having learned all these interesting details from the old manuscripts, let us leave them for a moment and study the three existing specimens of Ancient Mexican atlatl which have come under my notice. The finest of these is in the Museo Kircheriana in Rome where I had the privilege of examining it closely in May,

1890. The British Museum specimen ranks next in excellency of workmanship and is moreover the most complete. It still retains one of the two finger rings made of shell, that were originally attached to its handle. The third specimen is at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, where I saw it in 1888. The three specimens consist alike of a long straight piece of a very hard and fine-grained wood (zapote?). Each is provided with a central "spear shaft groove" ending with a "hook or spur" and each must have originally had lateral finger rings, attached like those of the London specimen. I have much pleasure in acknowledging the courtesy of Signor Cav. Pigorini, the director of the Kircheriana Museum, to whom I am also indebted for the following measurements of the atlatl in the Mexican collection:

Total length	. . . . .	558 mm.
Maximum width (upper end)	. . . . .	37 mm.
Minimum " lower "	. . . . .	19 mm.
Length of groove	. . . . .	492 mm.
Maximum width of groove	. . . . .	6 mm.
Minimum " " " "	. . . . .	4 mm.

This specimen is ornamented with very finely and skilfully executed carvings, in low relief, of human figures and symbols. These cover both sides of the atlatl and extend from its upper end to the end of the groove. The *finish* and *execution* of the carving though in lower relief recalls that we are accustomed to see on Chinese camphor-wood boxes. The outlines of the figures strikingly resemble those of the drawings in the Vienna Codex. Two standing and four seated human figures are carved on the back of this atlatl. On the front, on both sides of the groove, besides human figures, I counted one representation of a serpent and no less than five finely carved serpents' heads. (It is an interesting fact and one to which I will revert, that the serpent symbol is carved on each of the three specimens I have mentioned.) On the space between the base of the groove and the upper end of the atlatl a larger spread figure of a warrior (Huitzilopochtli?) is carved. His head is so curiously placed that it is a projection from under his chin that forms the hook or spur for launching the spear. In the right hand he holds what looks like a double-barbed point of a harpoon; in the left, a bundle of light darts across which a serpent's head is carved.

The whole surface of the carving is covered with a fine layer of purest gold in fairly good preservation.

The British Museum specimen also exhibits traces of gilding. I have come across the records of two throwers (*tiraderas*!) of gold which were sent to Charles V by Cortes.<sup>1</sup> The second one, described as "a thrower of gold in the shape of a bishop's crosier" (*una tiradera de oro á manera de baculo*), was of massive gold and its weight is given as 368 *pesos de oro*, the exact equivalent of which in our weights, I have not been able to determine.

Let us cast a glance at the hitherto unrecognized representations of atlatl on the bas-reliefs of Chichen-Itza, Yucatan, and on the so-called Sacrificial Stone in the city of Mexico.

In his publication on the latter monument (*Anales del Museo Nacional*, tomo I, page 31) Señor Orazco y Berra wrote: "The weapons held by the prisoners . . . are two arrows held with their points upwards. The object offered with the right hand does not represent "flowers," as Humboldt and Nebel believed, but is a weapon, as Ramirez determined. It is the sacrificial knife, and is the symbol for sacrifice. It is made of silex = *tecpatl*, and not of obsidian = *itztli*, and is characterized by being mounted on a handle of wood by which it was held so as to protect the hand using it. It had a guard (*tope*), the purpose of which was to prevent it from penetrating beyond a certain depth."

Señor Jesus Sanchez (*Anales del Museo Nacional*, tomo III, page 133) likewise describes the object held as "a certain kind of stone knife furnished with a guard." Reference to Pl. I, fig. 6b, will convince the reader that this weapon is an atlatl, the complement to the two spears held in the left hand. The same form of atlatl will also be recognized in fig. 6a below the shield held by the warrior, besides two spears and a banner = *macpanitl*.

Stephens (*Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, vol. II, page 309) was the first to note the general resemblance between the sculptured figures on the "Sacrificial Stone" and on the walls of the chamber at Chichen-Itza. It is strange that this careful observer should have overlooked the weapon represented in the right hand of the Chichen-Itza warrior, and described these warriors as "carrying a bundle of spears or a quiver of arrows" only.

M. Désiré Charnay (*Les Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, page 308) made a special note of the truly remarkable resemblance between the carvings of both monuments and went so far as to state

<sup>1</sup> Coleccion de Documentos Inéditos del Archivo de Indias, tomo 12, pp. 349 and 352.



that the personages on each carried identical weapons. But M. Charnay described the weapon held in the right hand as a "sacred knife," and identified it with the ceremonial knife made of painted wood, mentioned by Sahagun (lib. II, cap. 37). The fact is that the resemblance noted by Stephens and Charnay, is a more significant one than either supposed. For both of these monuments, widely separated though they are, exhibit atlatl of precisely the same shape, proportion and decoration, represented as held in the same manner.

This similarity, which may be partially studied by means of Pl. I, is all the more remarkable when contrasted with the extreme variety and diversity of forms of atlatl observable in even a single Codex. And the likeness of the Chichen-Itza and Mexican sculptured atlatl is all the more significant as it coincides with other facts which I will present, with my conclusions based thereupon, in a future communication.



FIG. 1.

From Vatican Codex A, 70.

Visitors to the National Museum at Washington and the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology at Cambridge can have the privilege of becoming acquainted with these extremely interesting bas-reliefs by means of their admirable casts made by M. Désiré Charnay. The four nearly life-sized warriors sculptured on the two stone posts of a doorway in the building

known as the "Tennis Court," in Chichen-Itza, are of special importance. They show us that besides several long light darts, and an atlatl, a warrior also carried a short heavy spear provided with a large barb, single or double. This can be seen projecting from the peculiar quivers over the left arms of figures 1 and 2, Pl. I. A quiver recalling that of fig. 1 and a large spear with double barb are represented on page 70 of Vatican Codex A. A warrior holds these in one hand (see fig. 1) and a peculiar atlatl in the other (Pl. II, 8). I was struck by the resemblance of this double barb to the one in the hand of the personage carved on the atlatl preserved in Rome. The fact that he holds such a barbed spear point and also

a bundle of light darts, leads to the inference that the atlatl he is carved on was intended to launch both missiles. It is interesting to find the Chichen-Itza warriors similarly armed.<sup>1</sup>

Returning now to the pictures of atlatl taken from the Codices, we find that the existence of a spear-shaft groove and hook could scarcely be inferred from the front views (Pl. II, 14, 15, 16), of atlatl of the same type as the sculptured ones.

Indeed the only representations of atlatl I know of, in which the spear-shaft groove and hook are distinctly visible, are those carved on the bas-reliefs of Chichen-Itza (Pl. I, 2, 3 and 4). But as soon as the artist began to make a drawing of the atlatl held ready for use or actually launching the spear he was forcibly reminded of the important role performed by the hook. In endeavoring to reproduce this he seems to have sometimes exaggerated its proportionate size. At all events, he drew it *en profile* though retaining the back view of the hand and of the finger holes and handle of the atlatl (Pl. II, 2, 13, 17-20). This distorted drawing was evidently adopted as one of the conventional ways of picturing an atlatl, and it will be well to bear the possibility of exaggeration and distortion in mind whilst studying all pictures in which the hook is visible. It is, of course, quite impossible for us to judge of the fidelity with which the artist may have drawn the proportions of the hook. The existing specimens and the carved reproductions exhibit a small hook not rising above the level of the sides of the groove. On the other hand, we shall find a prominent hook pictured in a variety of forms and dimensions and also learn that the large recurvation of one ceremonial form of atlatl caused this to be compared, by the Spaniards, to a bishop's crosier.

In figs. 2, 13, 17, 18 and 20, Pl. II, we find the hook or spur consisting of a square projection. In fig. 19 this is modified to a point.

Figs. 28, 29, 31-34, Pl. II (from the Maya MS. of the Dresden Royal Library), fig. 37 (from the Troano MS.), and 7, 10, 12 and 13, Pl. III (from various Mexican MSS.), exhibit a curious recurvation vaguely recalling the fiddle-head ornament of the Ungava throwing stick described by Prof. Otis T. Mason.

<sup>1</sup> The curved weapon in the left hand of fig. 1 is likewise represented as held by the personage sculptured on the inner face of the left door post and also by those on columns in the Castillo de Chichen-Itza. Is it an atlatl like that engraved on the Humboldt celt (Pl. II, 39)? or a sort of a club?

Fig. 34 is unique and of special note on account of thongs represented as passed through and hanging from the atlatl. This specimen is from the Dresden Maya MS. and I refer again to Fray Diego de Landa's statement that the natives of Yucatan used "certain cords" with their spear-throwers (p. 10). Another unicum, provided with a finger-ring (Pl. II, 39), is that engraved on the Humboldt celt and identified by Prof. Valentini.<sup>1</sup>

Figs. 35, 36, 40, Pl. II (from the Dresden MS.), fig. 38 (from the Troano), figs. 1, 2, 4 and 5, Pl. III, already referred to, terminate in a more or less sharply recurved hook.

Passing on to the atlatl of Class II, with characteristic finger-pegs, we find the same square projections as distortedly drawn, Pl. III, 26, and the sharp hooks, Pl. III, 16, 17, also 6, we have already noticed in Class I.

Now that we have duly studied the structure and practical side of the atlatl, let us investigate the interesting symbolic and ceremonial forms under which it reappears as part of the paraphernalia of some of the principal Aztec deities.

#### HUITZILOPOCHTLI.

In the vignettes illustrating the account of this hero god's miraculous birth, etc., contained in the Laurentiana MS. of Sahagun's *Historia* (lib. III, cap. I), we find him depicted with a shield, one or more spears and an atlatl. This is curiously carved in the semblance of a serpent and is provided with lateral finger-pegs (Pl. III, 32, 33). The Nahuatl text relates that it was blue and was named *Xiuatlatl* = blue, or turquoise, atlatl. To find these pictures of Huitzilopochtli with an authenticated and unmistakable atlatl of a blue color, in the shape of a snake, is a fact of no ordinary importance, for it affords a clew to the meaning of the Nahuatl names of his weapons recorded elsewhere in the same MS. It is several times repeated (*op. cit.* lib. I, cap. 1, and *Historia de la Conquista*, cap. 38) that these consisted of a *xiuhcoatl* and a *mamahuaztli*. Literally translated, *xiuhcoatl* means: blue or (turquoise) serpent. *Mamahuaztli* is, in my opinion, the verbal noun of the verb *mamali* = to cleave, to split, to force one's self into a crowd of people, and means literally: "the splitter, the cleaver," no unfit name for a spear.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Two Mexican Chalchihuites. Proceedings of the Am. Ant. Soc. April 27, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> I am aware that the name *mamahuaztli* is generally applied, by modern writers, to "the stick used for making fire," although it is not to be found with this meaning in

Now Huitzilopochtli was not an ideal creation, an abstract deity, but a distinguished war-chief, about whose birth and life a halo of myth and romance had been posthumously thrown. He was a real personage, "a vassal, a mortal—also a mighty magician and a leader of battles." The weapons he had used were actually preserved as relics and it was believed that some of the power with which they had once been wielded had passed into them. For it is recorded as an historical fact, that during the final terrible struggle of the Mexicans, in a time of direst distress, the last of Aztec herochiefs, Quauhtemotzin, ordered the bravest of his warriors to take Huitzilopochtli's relics, the "blue serpent" and "the cleaver" and venture boldly into the ranks of the Spaniards, for he who bore them was invulnerable and could not be vanquished (Sahagun's Hist. Conq. l. XII, cap. 38).

Whilst it has been remarked before that the "xiuhcoatl" was the special symbol of Huitzilopochtli, it has not as yet been recognized that this "blue serpent" *was a name for his atlatl of symbolic form*. It is not difficult to imagine why, in the first case, the serpent was selected as an appropriate symbol for the swift thrower of a fatal dart. It is an interesting fact, moreover, that the serpent symbol is prominently carved on each of the existing specimens of Mexican atlatl. It is still more interesting, however, to ascertain, through authentic records, that atlatl, made in the shape of a serpent and inlaid with turquoises, were in real ceremonial use at the time of the Conquest.

It is a well-known fact that, soon after the landing of Cortes, Montezuma sent him by messengers, as presents, priestly ceremonial vestments and insignia, such as were worn in religious solemnities by the high priests or living representatives of Aztec gods.<sup>1</sup> Among the insignia of Quetzalcoatl, the title, in this case,

Molina's or M. Rémi Siméon's dictionaries. In these it is only recorded as the name given by the Ancient Mexicans to the constellation Gemini. In the Nahuatl text of Sahagun's MS., the stick used for making fire is termed "tlequautil" literally=fire (tletl), stick (quautil), (*op. cit.* lib. VII, cap. IX). But the Spanish text describes this as being "long and thin, like an arrow or dart." We know that sticks with points hardened by fire were thrown by atlatl and Sahagun's MS. contains numerous illustrations of such (Pl. III, 23). Tezozomoc terms these "varas tostadas" or tlantzontell. He mentions, however, a "vara tostada with three points" (*op. cit.* 392). As Sahagun informs us that all the cane-stalks *otlatl* employed as shafts for arrows or spears were first subjected to a process of hardening by fire, it would seem as though the term "vara tostada" was as appropriate for shafts simply sharpened to a point as for those tipped with obsidian or fish-bone.

<sup>1</sup> For the reasons why these insignia were sent to Cortes, see p. 35, my essay, "Standard or Head dress?" Peabody Museum Papers, Vol. I, No. 1, 1888.

of the high priest of Huitzilopochtli, Sahagun records in the Spanish text (lib. XII, cap. IV) : "a sceptre like a bishop's crosier, all inlaid with mosaic composed of turquoises; the upper curve consisted of a serpent's head bent or twisted over." Another "crosier like the above" is enumerated also with the vestments of Tlalocantecuhltli; a third "crozier inlaid with turquoises in whose upper curve precious stones or prominent pearls were set" is described with the insignia of the god Quetzalcoatl."

The Nahuatl text of the Laurentiana MS. of Sahagun's *Historia* simply terms the first crosier a "*xioatl* (blue or turquoise atlatl) made entirely of fine turquoises, of the serpent's-head form = with serpent's head;" the second crosier is termed a "*coatopil* = serpent staff, worked in mosaic," and the third an *heca xonecuilli* of bent or curved wood, inlaid with stars formed of white chalchilmities." Many of these presents were forwarded by Cortes to Charles V in July, 1519, and the descriptive inventory sent with them has, fortunately, preserved many interesting details that complete our knowledge of the modes of structure and ornamentation of the atlatl. It shows us also that two atlatl went to Spain as "sceptres," and that each was accompanied by four spears or "harpoons" of equal elaborateness. It seems probable that the following entry and description were those of Tlalocantecuhltli's coatopilli or serpent staff:

"A sceptre, inlaid with scarlet precious stones, made like a serpent with its head and teeth and eyes which look like mother-of-pearl. The handle is covered with painted leather and from it hang six small tufts of feathers."<sup>1</sup> Further on is the entry: "four harpoons with white obsidian points, fastened to shafts decorated with feather-work." It is a noteworthy fact that the *atlatl* and *spears together* constitute a single item in another part of the same *Memoria*: "idem. four harpoons, adorned with feathers, with points of stone tied on with gold thread and a sceptre inlaid with precious stones, with two rings of gold and the rest feather work." It is scarcely possible to identify this atlatl with one or the other of Montezuma's presents described above, although it must have been one of them. It is evidently this atlatl that Gomara<sup>2</sup> writes of as "a staff like a royal sceptre finished with two rings of gold that are garnished with pearls." His description of the harpoons is of special inter-

<sup>1</sup>Coleccion de documentos inéditos para la historia de España, Memoria. tom. I, p. 461.

<sup>2</sup>Histoire de Méxique, Anvers, 1551. cf. Clavigero, *op. cit.*, ed. Mora, p. 250.

est because he calls them "four *tridents* each with three points, ornamented with featherwork of many colors. The points are of 'berrueco' (bone?) and are tied on with gold thread."

Now we find that Cortes sent, as a curiosity and present to his Grace the Bishop of Burgos, "a something like a crosier inlaid with precious stones of many colours."<sup>1</sup> So it seems that the three "crosiers" were sent to Europe. It need not seem astonishing that Cortes and his followers did not recognize or record the true nature of these "crosiers." It must be borne in mind that when these were received as presents and forwarded the Spaniards had not yet acquired a knowledge of the weapons used in Aztec warfare. Then these atlatl of eccentric shape, costly materials and elaborate decoration were certainly intended to be more ornamental than useful. They were ceremonial and symbolic and were destined for use in religious rites by the high priests or living representatives of the Aztec deities or in the decking out of their images. Both Tezozomoc (*op. cit.*, p. 94) and Duran (*op. cit.*, II, 81) describe Huitzilopochtli's "idol in the great temple of Mexico" as holding "in the right hand *what resembled a bishop's crosier*, made in the shape of a serpent, all blue, with undulations — in the left a shield and four arrows or spears." In the great festival in honor of this hero-god held in the month Panquetzaliztli we are told by Sahagun that his high-priest, entitled Quetzalcoatl, bore his idol in solemn procession whilst another priest carried the image of Paynal. These were preceded by a "mace-bearer with a sceptre in the form of a monstrous serpent, all covered with mosaic composed of turquoises."<sup>2</sup>

It is but lately that I came across the most interesting pictures of serpent atlatl in a scarcely known, but very valuable and important Mexican MS., preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence.

The first of these (Pl. III, 29) to which I will revert, distinctly exhibits the characteristic lateral finger rings of Class I.

The second is represented in the picture of a personage clad in the habiliments of Huitzilopochtli and (Pl. I, 7) carrying four spears, a shield and banner besides the atlatl.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Coleccion de documentos inéditos del Archivo de Indias, tomo 12, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.* Appendix to Book II, also chap. 34, book II of Torquemada, *op. cit.*, II, 282, who confounds the symbolic serpent atlatl with the banner also carried in procession.

<sup>3</sup> This picture is of exceptional importance as it exhibits a head-dress with striking points of resemblance to the ancient Mexican feather head-dress preserved in Vienna and lends the strongest support to my view of the question. Readers of my essay on

The serpent-atlatl is not, however, exclusively represented with Huitzilopochtli.

#### XIUHTECUHLI.

The splendid specimen with finger rings just mentioned, is painted in the hand of *Xiuhtecuhtli*, as the text declares and on folio 89 of the same manuscript we find the same god, with well-known attributes, holding a shorter serpent atlatl besides a shield, banner and four spears. In the Vatican Codex A (p. 56) he is represented with a blue atlatl (Pl. III, 4) and a strange bent serpent staff in his left hand. The latter resembles the serpent staff held by Quetzalcoatl in the Vatican Codex B (21) and accompanied by a harpoon recalling fig. 1. In Tezozomoc (455) a serpent staff "coatopilli" is mentioned among the insignia of Quetzalcoatl.

#### TEZCATLIPOCA.

We also find this god with serpent spear-throwers: in Sahagun's Laurentiana Manuscript (Pl. III, 30 and 31), in the Borgian Codex, p. 22 (Pl. III, 27), and in the Ramirez Codex (x, 17) (Pl. III, 28). In his explanatory text to the latter,<sup>2</sup> Señor Alfredo Chavero describes this as "the weapon in the form of a serpent, the *xiuhcoatl*" without, however, directly identifying it as an atlatl.

#### QUETZALCOATL.

Let us now examine another ceremonial form of atlatl, that which we invariably encounter in representations of the god Quetzalcoatl.

We have already found its description among Montezuma's presents to Cortes. The Spanish text terms it a "crosier inlaid with

this historical relic ("Head-dress or Standard?" Peabody Mus. Papers, I, 1888) may be interested in having their attention especially drawn to the following details and in comparing them with the illustrations of the Vienna head-dress contained in the above essay.

1. Note and compare superposed central elevation, its proportions and decoration with discs.

2. The symmetrical design on the second concentric band above the forehead. A comparison of the coloring of this illustration is also desirable; the ground of the central portion is *blue* (the discs are left uncolored) and it is surrounded by an *edge of scarlet*. (Observe that "the most striking feature of the Vienna head-dress is a broad blue band edged with scarlet," p. 36, *op. cit.*)

Starting from the band above the forehead the colors of the concentric bands are as follows: 1, red; 2, left uncolored with pattern; 3, blue; 4, red; 5, green.

A long fringe of Quetzal tail-feathers surmounts the whole.

<sup>2</sup>Appendix to Duran's *Historia II*, Mexico, 1880.

turquoises, in whose upper curve precious stones or prominent pearls were set." The Nahuatl text has informed us that it was "of bent or curved wood on which were stars, formed of white chalchilmites."

Sahagun (lib. i, cap. v) likewise describes the idol of this god as holding in his left hand a shield, in his right "a sceptre like a bishop's crosier; its top was bent like a bishop's crosier and it was profusely inlaid with mosaic. But it was not as long as a crosier and that part by which it was held looked like a sword-hilt."

Duran (ii, 119) relates that this "resembled a sickle, was of wood and painted black, white and red. Near its handle hung a tassel of white and black leather." This authority also states that the idol "carried a shield," but Torquemada (*op. cit.*, p. 290) states that, besides this, it held "a finely decorated spear, very large, with a point of obsidian of the shape and size of the iron points to one of our lances."

Referring first to the pictures of Quetzalcoatl's weapon in Sahagun's MS. (Pl. iii, 24 and 25) we recognize in it a recurved atlatl with finger pegs. Its drawing is evidently distorted; the artist represented, as we have already had occasion to observe in other cases, a side view of the curve and a front view of the handle and finger-pegs. At a first glance its proportions strike one as exaggerated, but not unfamiliar, and it is interesting to compare figures 14, 15, 18, 19, 20 and 21, Pl. iii, with the spear-throwers 1, 2, 4, 5 and 16 of Pl. iii, and 36, 37, 38 and 39 of Pl. ii. Figures 14, 19 and 50 of Pl. iii represent specimens with smooth outline and transverse bands of color which recall Duran's description of "wooden sickles painted." Sahagun's illustrations however and fig. 18, Pl. iii, exhibit ornamentation and have, moreover, a series of small balls placed along the outer edge of the curve. But this was, it is evident, only a conventional method of expressing the fact that these atlatl were inlaid or studded with precious stones. For we find real bishops' crosiers represented in the identical extraordinary manner by native artists, soon after the Conquest, figs. 2 and 3, p. 26. From these pictures we learn the interesting fact that whilst the Spaniards likened this form of ceremonial atlatl to a bishop's crosier, the Mexican artist, on attempting to delineate a crosier, drew it as he would an atlatl. Therefore, it is quite evident that the resemblance was a very strong one.

Now, let us produce our crowning proofs that this strange "crosier" was a ceremonial atlatl. It is generally represented, as we



have seen, accompanied by one part of military armor, a shield. In Sahagun's MS., it is also accompanied, in one instance, by spears; but in the Aubin Codex (appendix to Duran's Atlas) Tezcatlipoca (III, 19) carries it with a shield, banner and *two spears* and in the MS. of the Biblioteca Nazionale it is pictured as held by the god of the chase, Mixcoatl, along with *two spears*, a shield, banner and provision bag (Pl. III, 14). In this MS. the text informs us that it was named *Mixcoatl xonoquiltl*. As we have seen, Fray Sahagun, recorded the name as *heca xonecuilli* in the Laurentiana MS. of his *Historia*. Each of these names for the curved atlatl seems to be, in the first case, descriptive of its form.

The word "xonecuilli" or "xonoquiltl" is, I should say, a syn-



FIG. 2.

Bishop Zumaraja, first bishop of Mexico.  
Telleriano-Remensis Codex, p. 30.



FIG. 3.

Archbishop Montufar. MS. History of Mexico, 1576.

thesis of the verbs *xolla* = to cut, to carve, to hew, or *xolochoa* = to bend or fold something, and *necuiloa* = to twist or bend something. It would, therefore, only mean "that which is curved, twisted or bent." Certain loaves of bread, made during the feast of the god Macuilxochitl, were also named "xonecuilli." We are told by Sahagun (I, 14) that "these were of the form of a stroke of falling lightning." Mr. Rémi Siméon, in a note to his admirable translation of Sahagun's *Historia* (p. 32), describes these as "loaves of the form of an S."

The fact that a stroke of lightning was symbolized by a certain form termed "xonecuilli," and that this was the name of a ceremonial form of atlatl illumines a whole series of obscure passages. Duran has recorded that Tlaloc's emblem "was of carved wood *shaped like a stroke of lightning*" (I, p. 306). He also re-

lates that Tlaloc's idol held in his right hand "*a stroke of lightning of wood, painted purple.*" This was undulated, like a stroke of wavy lightning falling from the clouds to the ground (II, 136). Tezozomoc (434) and Orozco y Berra (III, 360) tell us that Tlaloc's staff was called *tlapellaquauitl* or "staff casting out lightning."

To examine Tlaloc's emblems further would be to transgress beyond the limit of my subject. Suffice it, therefore, to have been confirmed in the knowledge that lightning and swift destruction were symbolized by a certain curved form, and that this form was that of a ceremonial atlatl.

It seems as though one could discern the line of thought that led the ancient Mexicans to associate lightning and (the closely allied) serpent symbolism with their military arm for throwing fatal missiles. They may have done so at first with the belief and hope of endowing their atlatl with the qualities they recognized in both destructive forces. It is easy to understand how, by gradual transition the forces themselves should come to be symbolized by the weapons and that these should become more and more emblematic and depart from their primitive form. This transition was taking place at the time of the Conquest and had reached its maximum in Quetzalcoatl's and Tlaloc's lightning-hurler and Huitzilopochtli's *xiuhcoatl* or turquoise serpent. But even in these ceremonial emblems the form and idea of the atlatl were far from being abandoned and were ever present. Nothing proves this more clearly than a figure of speech preserved by Padre Olmos.<sup>1</sup> From him we learn that, to express the idea that we might render by the phrase, "He smote the people," meaning a visitation of famine or pestilence, christianized Mexicans made use of an ancient metaphor and said, "He hurls (with) the *xiuhcoatl*, the *mamalhuaztli* upon them."

Let us now hastily review the atlatl represented with

#### TEZCATLIPOCA.

We have found him with the serpent-atlatl, Pl. III, 27, 28, 30 and 31, and with the lightning-atlatl, Pl. III, 18, 19.

Duran (II, 106) and Tezozomoc (109) give a valuable indication by telling us that, in each town, there were two different idols of Tezcatlipoca.

In the great temples of Texcoco and the city of Mexico one

<sup>1</sup> Grammaire de la langue Nahuatl, édition Rémi Siméon, Paris, 1875, p. 227.

image was seated ; in its left hand were a shield and four spears and in the right a spear. His arm was raised in threatening gesture as though he wished to throw it and this spear was placed in an "amiento = atlatl."

Both of these authorities give us pictures, by native artists, of this idol (fig. 4 *A*, *B*,) and both agree in their description of the second idol.

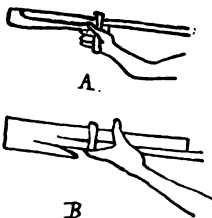


FIG. 4.

A.—Duran's Atlas.  
B.—Ramirez Codex.

It carried also *four spears* but we are told that in the other hand it held a "fan" of precious feathers. These were green and yellow and were fastened to a circular plate of burnished gold like a mirror . . . which fan was called "y tlachiyān." Duran's illustration corresponds to this description but pictures the circular plate as a hollow circle divided by lines into four portions.

Reference to Tezcatlipoca's picture in Sahagun's Laurentian MS. proves this "fan" to be a mis-described "tlachieloni," an instrument we find thus represented in the hand of this and other gods (fig. 5.) His description is contained in the chapter of this work

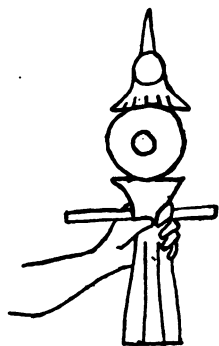


FIG. 5.

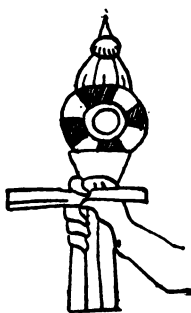


FIG. 6.

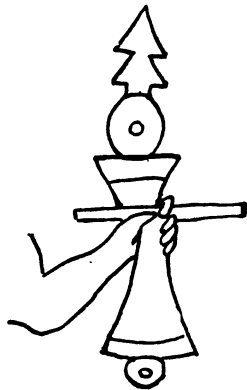


FIG. 7.

Sahagun's Laurentiana MS., Book I.

relating to Xiuhtecuhtli: "he holds in his left hand a shield ; in the right what was like a sceptre (fig. 6). It was a circular plate of gold, hollow in the centre. This was surmounted by two balls, one smaller than the other, and there was a point on the top of

the smallest. They called this sceptre *Tlachieloni*, which means 'seer or looker,' for with it one could hide one's face and look through the circle of gold" (lib. I, cap. XIII). In the text relating to *Opuchtlí*, the reputed inventor of the harpoon, it is described as "a sceptre like a monstrance or pyx, at the top of which projects an arrow point," from which one would scarcely recognize its picture in the same chapter (fig. 7). I do not hesitate in identifying this "*tlachieloni*" as a badly drawn ceremonial form of the *atlatl* provided with a finger-hole, that we have studied with Class I.

Notice that this "*tlachieloni*" is only met with in Sahagun's illustrations to book I, in Duran's *Atlas* and in the *Aubin Codex*, all of which date unquestionably from after the Conquest. Even in these it is invariably accompanied by a shield and in the cases of *Xiuhtecuhtli* and *Tezcatlipoca* with *spears* or a shield and a banner.

It is also a significant fact that we find only exceptional *tlachieloni* in the hands of deities *who are usually represented with various forms of authentic atlatl* by the artists of older Codices. Beside *Tezcatlipoca*, see *Xiuhtecuhtli* (Pl. II, 9, 24 and III, 1, 4, 5 and 29).

The name *tlachieloni*, meaning "that through which one can look" (from the verb *tlachia* = to look) is descriptive and would be equally applicable to all the *atlatl* provided with finger-holes through which one could look. One is led to infer by Duran's text, however, that a symbolism was attached to this ceremonial form of *atlatl* and that the circle through which one could look had become emblematic of the power of sight. Fray Duran records the popular belief that "*Tezcatlipoca* saw all that happened in the universe." The circles or rings usually represented about the eyes of *Tlaloc* conveyed, undoubtedly, a similar symbolism and were the emblem of constant watchfulness and powerful, all-seeing vision.

Pausing now to review the principal Aztec gods in their representations, one cannot but be struck by the fact established by the foregoing testimony that *each god carries, as symbol, some form of atlatl*. Turning to the sculptured monuments of Mexico and Yucatan we find the *atlatl* and the spear and an almost total absence of any other weapon. The same observation applies to the older Maya and Mexican Codices.

In the Mexican MSS. dating from the time of the Conquest one can trace the disappearance of the *atlatl* by its increasingly incorrect representations and note its extinction by finding these finally superseded by pictures of the bow and arrow. And thus the inter-

rupted evolution of the truly wonderful atlatl, the spear-thrower of ancient Mexico, came to an end.

The atlatl, although exquisitely carved, covered with gold, inlaid with turquoise, decorated with feather work and exhibiting the remarkable degree of skill attained by an industrious and intelligent race, seems, indeed, to be a fitting epitome of the strange civilization of Ancient Mexico, the real barbarism of which was mitigated by the most marvellous perfection in every detail of industrial art.

*Dresden, August, 1890.*

## **ILLUSTRATIONS.**

## PLATE I.

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- Figs. 1, 2. Sculptured warriors on stone posts of doorway of building known as the "Tennis-Court," Chichen-Itza. Drawings from photographs of casts.
- 3, 4, 5. Warriors from bas-relief on wall of a chamber. "Palace of the Tigers," Chichen-Itza.
- 6a. Sculptured warrior carrying atlatl below shield, on so-called Sacrificial Stone, City of Mexico.
- 6b. Sculptured warrior presenting atlatl, also on so-called Sacrificial Stone.
7. Picture of Huitzilopochtli holding the Xiuhcoatl = the blue serpent atlatl, — four spears, a shield and banner.  
The head-dress strikingly and closely resembles the Ancient Mexican head-dress preserved in Vienna. It has a similar central superposed elevation also ornamented with discs. The design on the border close to the face recalls the symmetrical "castellated" ornamentation on the Vienna head-dress.

Ancient Mexican MS., National Library, Florence, folio 89.

(200)



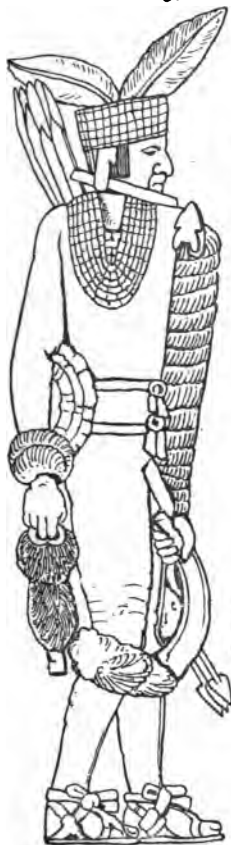
3.



4.



5.



1



6<sup>a</sup>



6<sup>b</sup>



7.

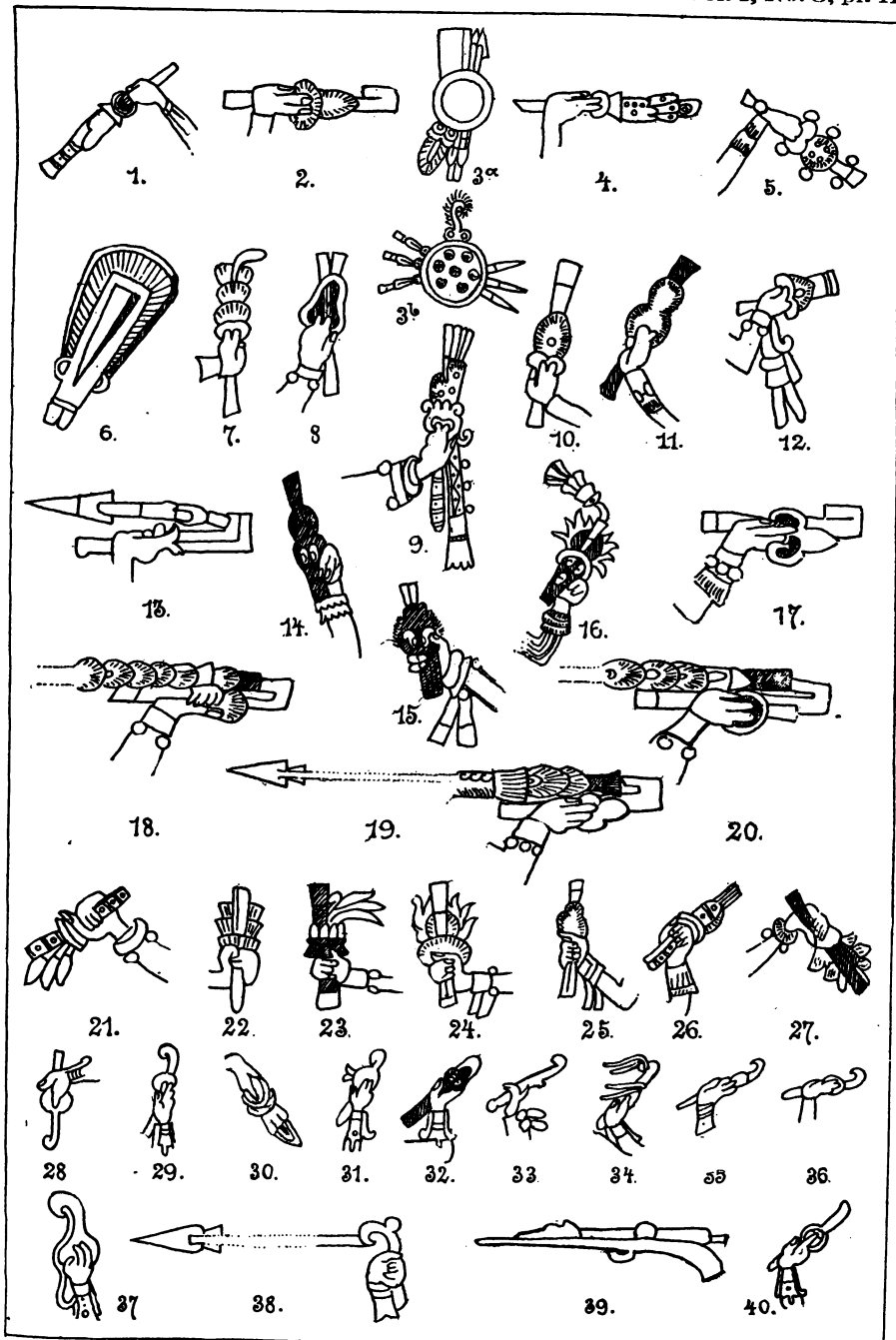


2.



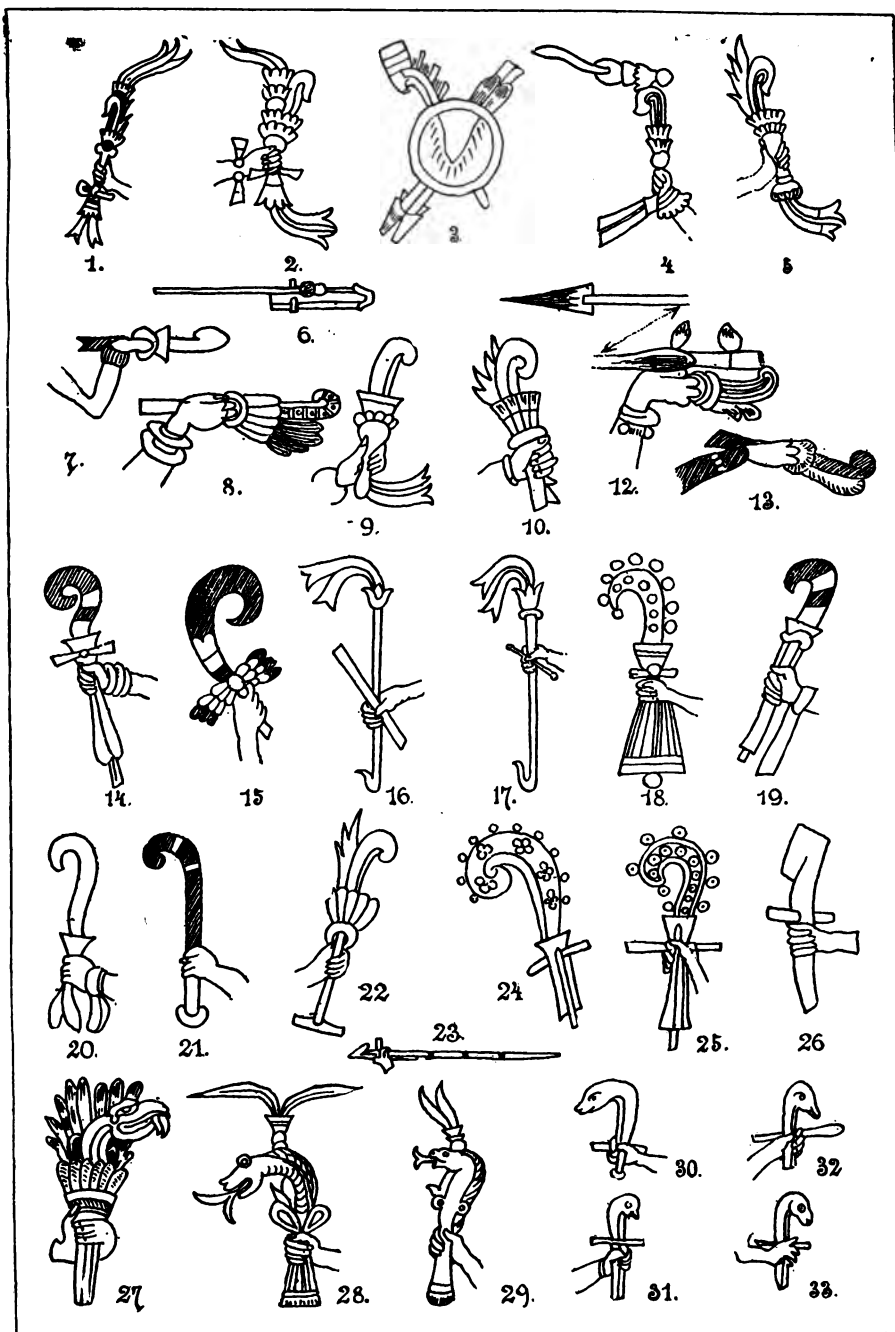
# PLATE II.

	FROM	ACCOMPANIED BY
Fig. 1.	Vues des Cordillères, . . . p. 15.	
2.	Laud MS., . . . p. 18,	spears (2).
3a.	So-called Sacrificial Stone. . .	spears (2), shield, banner.
3b.	Mendoza Codex, . . . p. 5,	spears (3), shield.
4.	Borgian " . . . p. 34,	spears (2).
5.	Féjervary " . . .	spears (2).
6.	Bas-relief, Dupaix I, . . p. 23,	spears (4), shield, etc.
7.	Laud Codex, . . . p. 20,	spears (2) double.
8.	Vatican Codex A, . . . p. 70,	spear (1) and quiver.
9.	Borgian " . . . p. 54,	spear-bundle.
10.	Laud " . . . p. 6,	spear (1).
11.	Féjervary " . . . p. 32,	shield, banner.
12.	Vienna " . . . p. 50,	spears (2), banner.
13.	Selden " . . . p. 1,	shield.
14.	Vatican " A, . . . p. 17,	spear (triple).
15.	" " " . . . p. 27,	spears (3).
16.	" " " . . . p. 14,	" "
17.	Bologna " . . . p. 21,	spears (3), shield.
18.	" " . . . p. 24,	" " "
19.	" " . . . p. 14,	" " "
20.	" " . . . p. 15,	" " "
21.	Borgian " . . . p. 18,	spears (3), shield, banner.
22.	" " . . . p. 69,	" (2), " "
23.	Féjervary " . . . p. 43,	" (3).
24.	Vatican " A, . . . p. 29,	" (3).
25.	" " " . . . p. 27,	" (2).
26.	" " " . . . p. 13,	" (3).
27.	Borgian " . . . p. 4,	spear (double), shield, banner.
28.	Dresden " . . . p. 65,	spears (2).
29.	" " . . . p. 60,	copal-bag?
30.	Carved on teponaxtle in British Museum, . . .	spears (2).
31.	Dresden " . . . p. 47,	spears (2).
32.	" ed. Kingsborough, p. 48,	" "
33.	Dresden Codex, . . . p. 46,	shield (transfixed prey in vignette below).
34.	" " . . . p. 50,	spears (2).
35.	" " . . . p. 60,	spears (2).
36.	" " . . . p. 65,	spear (1).
37.	Troano " . . . p. 47,	spears (2).
38.	" " . . . p. 7,	spear (1).
39.	Engraved on Humboldt celt.	
40.	Dresden Codex, . . . p. 49,	spears (2).



# PLATE III.

Fig.	DESCRIBED BY		
	FROM	CONTEMPORARY TEXTS	ACCOMPANIED BY
		AS	
1.	Vatican Codex,	p. 32, Xiutlatl.	
2.	" "	p. 33, "a certain sort of arm as a bow."	spears, shield, banner.
3.	Vienna "	p. 20, . . . . .	spear, shield.
4.	Vatican "	p. 56, . . . . .	serpent, staff.
5.	" "	p. 74, . . . . .	spears, shield.
6.	MS. History of Mexico,	p. 33, Hieroglyph of town.	
7.	Féjervary Codex,	p. 44, . . . . .	spears.
8.	Borgian "	p. 14, . . . . .	" shield.
9.	Vatican, "	p. 68, . . . . .	" " banner.
10.	Telleriano Re- mensis Codex,	p. 8, Xiutlatl, . . . . .	provision bag.
12.	Borgian "	p. 61, . . . . .	shield.
13.	Féjervary "	p. 4, . . . . .	"
14.	National Library, Florence, MS.,	Mixcoatl xonoquitl, . . . . .	" " banner and provision bag.
15.	Duran's Atlas, II,	p. 6, . . . . .	shield.
16.	Vatican Codex,	p. 81, "amiento made of wood," . . . . .	" and banner.
17.	" "	p. 82, "amiento made of wood," . . . . .	" " "
18.	Ramirez " VII, p. 19,	. . . . .	"
19.	" " VIII, p. 13,	. . . . .	spears, shield, banner.
20.	Vatican "	p. 8, . . . . .	"ecacocœ."
21.	" (A) "	p. 14, . . . . .	copal-bag.
22.	" " "	p. 61, Xiutlatl, . . . . .	spears, shield.
23.	MS. Hist. Sahagun,	. . . . .	spear, shield.
24.	" " "	. . . . .	shield.
25.	" " "	. . . . .	spears.
26.	Boturini MS.,	Hieroglyph of town.	
27.	Borgian Codex,	p. 22, . . . . .	" shield, banner.
28.	Ramirez x,	p. 17, . . . . .	" " "
29.	National Library, Florence, MS.,	. . . . .	" " "
30.	MS. Hist. Sahagun.		
31.	" " "		
32.	" " "	. Xiuhatlatl, . . . . .	spear.
33.	" " "	. . . . .	spears and shield.





LES  
NAISSANCES MIRACULEUSES

*D'APRÈS*

La Tradition Américaine

PAR

Le Comte de CHARENCEY

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AMIENS  
IMPRIMERIE GÉNÉRALE, ROUSSEAU-LEROY

18. — Rue Saint-Fuscien. — 18

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1892

# LES NAISSANCES MIRACULEUSES

D'APRÈS

## LA TRADITION AMÉRICAINE

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Le savant et regretté L. Angrand, le premier, on le sait, a reconnu la double origine des civilisations du Nouveau-Monde. Toutes les populations policées de cet hémisphère paraissent, en effet, se rattacher soit au courant dit occidental dont faisaient partie les Mexicains proprement dits et, sans doute aussi, les mystérieux constructeurs du temple de Tiaguanaco dans le Haut-Pérou, soit à celui des Orientaux, comme les Mayas du Yucatan, et les Quichuas de l'époque Incacique (1). Ajoutons que certaines différences bien marquées dans le système religieux, la symbolique, l'art architectural, permettent de distinguer l'une de l'autre les populations appartenant à chacun des deux systèmes ci-dessus mentionnés. Sans vouloir étudier ici cette question, nous nous bornerons à l'examen d'un point particulier : la tradition d'un héros puissant et libérateur né sans le concours de l'homme semble avoir été spéciale

(1) L. Angrand, *Notes manuscrites et Lettre à M. Daly sur les Antiquités de Tiaguanaco.*

aux Occidentaux ; nous n'en trouvons pas trace, en effet, ni au Yucatan ni chez les habitants de Cuzco. Au contraire, l'on en rencontre des vestiges partout où l'influence occidentale a été prépondérante, soit dans le nord soit dans le sud du continent Américain. Ajoutons qu'elle se trouvait absolument conforme aux tendances Gynécocratiques de la religion Mexicaine qui accordait une prééminence incontestable au principe femelle sur le principe masculin.

Il y aurait peut-être quelque lieu de penser que les légendes relatives à cette naissance miraculeuse ne sont point écloses sur le sol Américain, qu'elles y ont été importées d'ailleurs. Nous pourrions même trouver là de précieux renseignements sur la façon dont les fables et les contes se propagent au loin.

Les Pimas de la Californie, incontestablement apparentés par la langue et, sans doute aussi, par leur système de civilisation aux Mexicains proprement dits, nous racontent que dans les temps les plus reculés, une jeune Vierge d'une beauté remarquable habitait les bords d'un lac verdoyant sur l'emplacement où se trouvent aujourd'hui les ruines des *Casas grandes*. Elle n'aimait personne et entendait rester fille. Une sécheresse survint qui menaçait de faire mourir la tribu de faim. Celle-ci leur donna du grain et des provisions qui ne s'épuisaient pas plus que ses libéralités. Un jour qu'elle dormait, un orage éclata et une goutte de pluie vint à tomber sur sa poitrine. A l'instant même la jeune fille se trouva enceinte d'un fils qui plus tard devint le constructeur des *Casas grandes* (1).

(1) M. H. Albert Emory, *Notes of a military record from Leavenworth in Missouri to San diego in California* ; pp. 82 et 83 ; (Washington, 1849), *Senat's documents*. — *Le fils de la Vierge*, p. 293 et suiv. du *Recueil des publications de la Société Hâvraise d'études diverses* (Le Hâvre, 1879).



Les indigènes d'Oraïbe regardent également leur Montézuma comme né d'une pauvre vierge (1) qui le mit au monde dans le pueblo de *Pecos*.

Voici, d'un autre côté, ce que les Mexicains racontent au sujet de la naissance de *Huitzilopochtli*, le dieu de la guerre. Sur une montagne non loin de Tulan et appelée *Coatepec*, litt. « A la Montagne du serpent » vivait une femme nommée *Coatlicué* litt. « Jupon de Serpent. » Elle était mère d'un grand nombre de fils appelés *Centzon vitznahuas*, litt. « les quatre cents Méridionaux » et avait une sœur appelée *Coyolxauhqui*, litt. « Grande dame parée à la mode antique ». Chaque jour, par esprit de pénitence, Coatlicué balayait le pavé du temple près duquel elle habitait. Pendant qu'elle était occupée de la sorte, une petite boule de plumes, semblable à une pelotte de fil tomba sur elle. L'ayant prise, elle la cacha sous sa jupe. Après avoir achevé sa tâche, elle voulut la reprendre, mais la pelotte avait disparu et Coatlicué se trouva enceinte. En apprenant cette nouvelle, les *Centzon vitznahuas* entrèrent en fureur et *Coyolxauhqui* leur conseilla de tuer leur mère, puisqu'elle les avait couverts de déshonneur.

L'enfant que Coatlicué portait dans son sein la rassura et calma son effroi en lui disant : « N'aie point peur, je sais ce que j'ai à faire. » Aussitôt sa mère sentit le calme renaître dans son âme. Décidés à mettre celle-ci à mort, les *Centzon vitznahuas* commencèrent à arranger leurs cheveux en torsades, comme des guerriers marchant au combat. L'un d'entre eux appelé *Quauhitlicac* qui n'approuvait pas leur dessein, alla prévenir *Huitzilopochtli*, lequel n'était pas encore né. Ce dernier répondit : « O mon oncle, regarde soigneusement ce qu'ils font,

(1) M. G. Thompson, *The pueblos and their inhabitants*, p. 321

écoute ce qu'ils disent, parce que je sais de mon côté, comment je dois agir. »

Cependant, les meurtriers apparaissent bien armés et le corps couvert de morceaux de papier. *Coyolxauhqui* leur servait de guide. Quauhitlicac court avertir Huitzilopochtli. « Où sont-ils en ce moment ? » demanda celui-ci. — « Ils arrivent à *Tzompantitlan*, litt. « Près du pieu patibulaire » répliqua le messenger. Peu après, Huitzilopochtli ajouta : « Et actuellement, où se trouvent-ils ? » — « A *Coaxcalco* », litt. « Auprès du Serpent de sable » répartit Quauhitlicac. Huitzilopochtli demande une fois encore « Où sont-ils ? » La réponse fut qu'ils arrivaient à l'instant à *Petlac*. Bientôt Huitzilopochtli réitère sa question. — Au milieu de la Sierra, lui dit-on. Et de nouveau Huitzilopochtli s'écria « Où sont-ils enfin. » — Les voici tout près, dit le messenger, et à leur tête marche Coyolxauhqui. Au même instant, le Mars mexicain sort tout armé du sein maternel. Il portait une rondache bleue appelée *teneuch* avec un dard teint de la même couleur. Sa figure était peinte et sa tête surmontée d'un ornement qui s'y trouvait collé. Sa jambe gauche était frêle et couverte de plumes ; les cuisses et les bras également peints en bleu. Il ordonna à un nommé *Tochan Calqui*, litt. « habitant de notre demeure », de mettre le feu à un serpent fabriqué en bois de pin, appelé *Xiuh coatl*, litt. « Serpent d'herbe » et sans doute métaphoriquement « Serpent enflammé ». En effet, *Xiuh teuctli*, litt. « Seigneur de l'herbe » était le dieu du feu de la mythologie Mexicaine. » Quoi qu'il en soit, ce fut avec ce bois enflammé que Coyolxauhqui fut frappée mortellement. Cela fait, Huitzilopochtli, les armes à la main, poursuivit les Centzon vitznahuas de la Sierra jusqu'à la plaine. Il fit ainsi quatre fois le tour de la montagne sans que ses frères pussent même se

défendre contre lui. Malgré leurs prières et leurs supplications, le Mars Mexicain les mit presque tous à mort. Quelques-uns cependant parvinrent à s'enfuir et se retirer au pays de *Huitzlampā*, litt. « Vers le sud ». Le vainqueur s'empara des dépouilles de ses frères et spécialement de leurs armes appelées *Anecuihōtl* (1).

Cette légende peut être fort ancienne, mais nous sommes, pour notre part, portés à croire qu'elle se trouve mêlée à des événements historiques de date bien plus récente et contemporains de la migration Aztèque. Nous n'avons pu, il est vrai, parvenir à identifier les noms de localités ici indiqués, mais ils ont pu changer par la suite des temps, à moins qu'elles ne soient de si minime importance que les auteurs modernes aient cru devoir les passer sous silence. *Coyolxauhqui*, « la grande dame mise à l'ancienne mode », et ses frères, les Centzon vitznahuas vaincus et repoussés vers le sud nous auraient tout l'air de personnifier les antiques habitants de ces régions défaits et expulsés par les Mexicas. Naturellement, ces derniers auront fait honneur de la victoire à leur dieu national, *Huitzilopochtli*.

On ne nous dit pas, il est vrai, que Coatlicué fut vierge et ce fait qu'elle passe pour mère d'une si nombreuse progéniture semble même attester le contraire, mais il n'en reste pas moins vrai que la naissance du Mars Mexicain doit être considérée comme tout-à-fait miraculeuse et qu'elle a été le résultat d'une intervention du Ciel.

D'après une légende mexicaine, le genre humain n'aurait pas eu de père ; mais la mère des premiers hommes serait *Sihuacoatl*, litt. « La femme serpent. » Elle conçut sans aucun commerce avec un individu du sexe mas-

(1) Sahagun, *Hist. gén. des Choses de la Nouvelle-Espagne* ; liv. 3<sup>e</sup>, chap. 1<sup>er</sup>, p. 201 et suiv. — Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana* ; t. 2, liv. 6, p. 41 et 42.

culin. Cette déesse apparaissait parfois vêtue de blanc, portant sur les épaules une sorte de hotte ou de petit berceau dans lequel se trouvait un enfant. D'autres fois, elle révélait pendant la nuit, sa présence par des cris plaintifs et des sanglots, mais sans se montrer en personne. Du reste, qu'on la vît ou qu'on se bornât à l'entendre, la chose passait pour de fort mauvais augure (1). Cette déesse semble avoir été confondue, par la suite, avec *Cohuatl*, litt. « Serpent », sœur du héros *Totépeuh* qui lui confia l'éducation de Quetzalcoatl après la mort de *Chimalman*, son épouse (2). L'on sait, du reste que, jusqu'à la fin de la Monarchie mexicaine, le titre de Cihua-Cohuatl fut décerné au ministre suprême de la justice et de la maison du roi (3).

Nous connaissons au Guatemala, la fameuse histoire de la vierge *Xquiq* fille du prince *Cuchumaquiq*. Le héros mystique des Guatémaliens, Hunhun-Ahpu ayant été mis à mort par ordre des chefs de l'état de Xibalba, on lui coupa la tête et on la plaça dans les branches d'un calebassier. Aussitôt, l'arbre se couvre de fruits, bien qu'il n'en eût point un seul auparavant. Bientôt, le chef du guerrier guatémalien se transforma lui-même en calebasse. De là, ajoute l'auteur américain, le nom de « Tête de Hunahpu » que porte ce fruit chez les Quichés.

Les princes Xibalbaïdes, témoins d'un tel prodige défendent d'approcher de l'arbre merveilleux. Cependant, la jeune *Xquiq*, entraînée par la curiosité, désobéit, se disant à elle-même avec une indiscretion digne de notre

(1) Torquemada, *Monarq. Indiana*, t. 2<sup>e</sup>; lib. 6<sup>e</sup>; cap. XXXI; p. 61.

(2) Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Hist. des Nat. civil.*, t. 1<sup>er</sup>; liv. 2<sup>e</sup>; chap. IV, p. 241.

(3) Abbé Brasseur, *ibid.*, t. III; liv. XII; chap. IV; p. 577.

mère Eve. « Les fruits de cet arbre doivent être bien savoureux. »

Etant partie seule, elle arriva au pied du calebassier, lequel s'élevait lui-même au milieu du cendrier. La vue des fruits lui arrache des cris d'admiration et elle ajoute : « En mourrai-je donc et sera-ce ma ruine si j'en cueille un ? »

Alors, continue le narrateur indigène, la tête de mort qui était au milieu de l'arbre parla. « Est-ce donc que tu en désires ? Les boules rondes qui se trouvent entre les branches de l'arbre, ce sont uniquement des têtes de mort. Est-ce que tu en veux toujours ? » ajouta-t-elle.

« Oui » répondit Xquiq, en étendant la main vers le crâne d'Hunhun-Ahpu. Alors, ce dernier lança avec effort un crachat dans la main de la jeune fille. Celle-ci regarda aussitôt le creux de sa main, mais la salive du mort avait déjà disparu.

« Cette salive et cette bave, c'est ma postérité que je viens de te donner, ajouta le crâne. Voilà que ma tête cessera de parler, car ce n'est qu'une tête de mort qui déjà n'a plus de chair. »

En effet, Xquiq se trouvait enceinte. Au bout de six mois, son père s'apercevant de son état, se mit en devoir de l'interroger. « Il n'y a pas d'homme dont je connaisse la face, ô mon père » répondit-elle. « En vérité, tu n'es qu'une fornicatrice », s'écria Cuchumaquiq et il ordonna de lui arracher le cœur, ainsi qu'on le faisait pour les victimes sacrifiées aux dieux. Les prêtres mexicains, on le sait, ouvraient la poitrine aux hommes immolés (1) sur leurs autels, afin que, suivant l'énergie que

(1) M. le Dr Jourdanet *Les Sacrifices humains et l'Anthropophagie chez les Aztèques*, p. 891 et suiv., Appendice de la traduction de l'*Histoire véridique de la conquête de la Nouvelle Espagne*, par Bernal Diaz ; (Paris, 1877.)

expression d'un écrivain indigène, le soleil eut des cœurs à manger et du sang à boire.

Xquiq parvient à exciter la compassion des exécuteurs, lesquels lui laissent la vie et s'avisent d'un subterfuge pour faire croire à Cuchumaquiq que son ordre a été suivi d'effet. La jeune fille se retire chez la mère de *Hunhun-Ahpu* au pays de Guatémala. C'est là qu'elle met au monde deux jumeaux destinés à venger leur père de la cruauté des princes de Xibalba (1).

L'abbé Brasseur insiste sur le côté historique de cette légende. Il y voit un souvenir des luttes jadis soutenues par les guatémaliens contre le puissant empire Yucatèque (2). Nous ne demandons pas mieux que de reconnaître le bien fondé de ces conjectures, mais ici, tout comme dans le récit de la naissance de Huitzilopochtli, nous croyons la légende beaucoup plus ancienne que les événements réels qui ont pu, par la suite, s'y trouver mêlés.

Le savant M. Jimenez de la Espada nous fait connaître d'après un manuscrit du D<sup>r</sup> Francisco de Avila, intitulé *Tratado y relación de los errores, falsos dioses y otras supersticiones etc., etc., en que vivian Antiguamente los indios de las Provincias de Huarochiri, Mama y Chaella*, la tradition suivante. Ce serait bien dans la Province de *Huarochiri*, c'est-à-dire sur le littoral péruvien, chez les Yuncas, qu'elle aurait été recueillie.

« Le Coniraya Viracocha, le Créateur de toutes choses, aurait apparu, il y a bien longtemps de cela, sous les traits d'un homme pauvre, d'apparence misérable et vêtu de haillons. Ceux qui ne le connaissaient pas

(1) Abbé Brasseur, *Popol vuh*, 2<sup>e</sup> partie ; chap. III, p. 91 et suiv.

(2) *Ibid.*, *ibid.*, Introd., p. CXXXVII et suiv.

« ne manquaient guère de le traiter de sale personnage  
« et depouilleux. Cependant, c'était par son ordre que tout  
« avait été fait, que les plateaux et cavités des monta-  
« gnes avaient été formés. Rien qu'en lançant une tige  
« creuse de la plante appelée *Canne de Castille*, il creu-  
« sait les canaux et les aqueducs. Il se rendait sur tous  
« les points de la terre pour mettre chaque chose en  
« ordre. Dans sa sagesse, il tournait en dérision et atta-  
« quait les *huacas* et idoles, partout où il les rencon-  
« trait. Alors vivait une jeune déesse vierge et excessi-  
« vement belle, appelée *Cavillaca*. Plusieurs dieux et  
« génies avaient sollicité sa main, mais sans succès.  
« Enfin un jour qu'elle était à tisser un manteau au pied  
« d'un arbre de l'espèce appelée *Lucumo*, Virococha  
« se déguisa en un joli oiseau et se percha sur l'arbre.  
« Il prit de sa semence et la fit entrer dans une *lucma*  
« bien mûre et bien appétissante. Ensuite, Viracocha  
« fit tomber le fruit auprès de la jeune fille qui, l'ayant  
« mangé, se trouva enceinte sur le coup et sans avoir  
« connu d'homme. Au bout de neuf mois, elle enfanta  
« un fils qu'elle allaita un an entier, sans s'être rendu  
« compte comment elle l'avait eu (1). »

Enfin, plus à l'est encore, nous trouvons une nouvelle version de la même légende, mais sous une forme assez archaïque et se rapprochant quelque peu de celle des Pimas. Les Manacicas, voisins des Chiquitos, et qui, jadis, ne formaient avec eux qu'une seule nation affirment qu'autrefois une vierge d'une grande beauté enfanta un fils sans avoir eu de relation avec aucun homme. Ce dernier, parvenu à l'âge viril, accomplit les plus grands prodiges, guérissant les malades, débarrassant de leur

(1) M. Jimenez de la Espada, *Mitos de los Incas*, p. 130 et 131  
t. II du *Congresso internacional de Americanistas* (Madrid, 1883).

infirmité les boiteux et les aveugles. Un jour, ayant rassemblé une grande foule de peuple, il s'envola au ciel et fut changé en soleil. Lui et l'astre du jour ne font qu'un et s'il ne se trouvait à une si grande distance, ajoutent les *Maponos* ou prêtres des idoles, on pourrait distinguer ses traits (1). Ce mystérieux personnage devrait-il être assimilé à *Ursana*, le fils du dieu suprême et qui a pour mère la déesse vierge Quipoci dont il sera question ailleurs ? C'est ce que nous n'oserions affirmer. Peut-être bien, au reste, les narrateurs espagnols ont-ils inconsciemment un peu retouché la légende indienne, pensant n'y voir qu'une version plus ou moins altérée de certains passages des évangiles. Il n'en est pas moins vrai qu'elle mérite d'être considérée comme authentique, du moins dans ses traits essentiels. Ces populations n'auraient-elles pas, comme les Moxos, subi l'influence des Atumurunas ou autres tribus du courant occidental jadis occupants de certaines régions du Pérou et de la Bolivie (2) ? La chose nous paraîtrait d'autant plus admissible qu'au point de vue de la symbolique des nombres, ainsi qu'il sera exposé autre part, les Manacicas semblent également se rapprocher des populations dites *Californiennes*.

L'on rencontre parfois Quelzatcoatl substitué à Huitztopochtli dans la légende mexicaine dont nous venons de parler. Ainsi, au dire de Mendieta, certains prétendent que *Chimalma* ou mieux *Chimalman*, litt. « la main du bouclier » étant occupée à balayer, avala un *chalchihuite*

(1) *Choix de lettres édifiantes*, etc. (Amérique), t. II ; p. 199. — *Relation des Missions du Paraguay*, trad. de l'Italien de Muratori, chap. III ; p. 38 ; (Paris, 1826).

(2) Angrand, *Lettre sur les Antiquités de Tiaguanaco*, p. 17 et suiv.



ou pierre de jade et se trouva aussitôt enceinte d'un fils qui fut Quetzalcoatl (1).

Les gloses de plusieurs *codices* racontent les faits d'une façon analogue. Ainsi le *Vaticanus* qui, au dire de M. Chavero constitue l'unique traité de Thégonie Nahoa parvenu jusqu'à nous, semble distinguer deux personnages du nom de Quetzalcoatl ; le premier fut l'un des sept qui échappèrent à la grande inondation. Il fut par la suite, ainsi que ses six compagnons, adoré comme dieu, spécialement, dit la glose, par les Chichimèques, c'est-à-dire, sans doute, par les populations de langue et de race mexicaine. On ne saurait guère refuser de l'identifier avec le demi dieu civilisateur des Toltèques-Orientaux, mais dont le culte, par la suite, fut aussi adopté par les Toltèques-Occidentaux. Le titre de *cœur du peuple* ou plutôt de cœur de la terre (2) à lui décerné semblerait bien le rapprocher du dieu mexicain Tépéyolotl, litt. « cœur de la montagne » ou mieux « cœur du pays », quelquefois adoré comme l'écho personifié. D'un autre côté, Votan, le fondateur de la monarchie des *Chans* ou « serpents », le héros civilisateur du Chiapas se trouve également invoqué sous le nom de « cœur du peuple ». C'est un nouveau motif pour nous de voir en lui surtout une forme secondaire du Quetzalcoatl Ulmèque qui aborda sur la côte de la Nouvelle-Espagne (3). Impossible également de ne pas reconnaître une parenté étroite entre ces deux personnages mythiques et le dieu des Mixtèques qualifié par Burgoa de « Corazon del

(1) Mendieta, *Hist. eccles. indiana* ; lib. II ; cap. V, pp. 82 et 83.

(2) Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Hist. des nat. civil.* ; t. I ; liv. I<sup>er</sup> ; chap. III ; p. 75. — *Le mythe de Votan* ; p. 45 du II<sup>e</sup> vol. des *Actes de la Société philologiq.*, etc.

(3) *Le mythe d'Imos* ; § XVIII et suiv. ; pp. 134 et suiv. du tome V (6<sup>e</sup> série) des *Annales de Philosophie chrétienne* (Paris 1873).

pueblo ». Nous savons qu'on l'adorait dans le fameux sanctuaire d'Achiutla, sous la forme d'une émeraude portant gravés un oiseau et un serpent enroulé. Enfin, c'est sans doute encore la même déité que l'on vénérât dans un temple souterrain, sous le nom de « cœur du royaume ». Le dit édifice était situé dans une île de la lagune sise près de Tehuantepec et connue, depuis la conquête espagnole sous le nom de Sane Dionisio de la mar.

M. Seller, au reste, fait observer que Tépéyotl ne paraît pas avoir été très populaire chez les Mexicains. Aucun des auteurs qui habitaient le plateau d'Anahuac, tels que Sahagun, Mendieta, Duran ne l'ont mentionné. Ce n'est que dans les *codices* qu'il en est question. Notre auteur en tire cette conclusion fort plausible à notre avis, que ce Dieu intitulé « cœur du peuple, cœur du royaume » pourrait bien être originaire des provinces du sud-ouest, du pays des Mixtèques ou des Zapotèques (1). Plus tard seulement, son culte aura pénétré dans les régions du Centre et de l'Est où on l'aura tantôt adoré comme une divinité spéciale sous le nom de Tépéyotl, tantôt assimilé à Votan et à Quetzalcoatl.

Quand au grand Quetzalcoatl, le réformateur religieux, voici ce que le codex Vaticanus rapporte à son sujet.

Le dieu *Citlallatonac* ou mieux *Citlaltonac*, litt. « étoile brillante », personnification de la voie lactée, envoya du ciel un messager à une vierge appelée Chimalman, lui annonçant qu'il voulait qu'elle conçût et enfantât d'une façon toute miraculeuse. Les deux sœurs de Chimalman appelées l'une *Tzochitlicué* ou mieux *Xochitlicué*, litt. « robe de fleurs » et l'autre

(1) M. Seller, *Das Tonalamatl der Aubinischen Sammlung und die Verwandten kalenderbuecher*; pp. 521 et suiv. du *Compte-rendu de la 7<sup>e</sup> section du Congrès des Américanistes*; (Berlin, 1890).

*Conatlicué* ou plus exactement *Cohuatlicué*, litt. « robe de serpent » moururent de frayeur à la vue de l'envoyé céleste. Quant à Chimalman, elle enfanta Quetzalcoatl, depuis adoré comme dieu de l'air. C'est lui qui introduisit l'usage des temples ronds inconnus jusqu'alors et détruisit le monde par le vent. Dès sa naissance, ainsi qu'il convient à un Dieu, Quetzalcoatl aurait eu le plein usage de sa raison (1).

D'après la glose de l'une des planches de la collection Kingsborough, c'est par un souffle que le dieu *Tonac-teuctli* ou *Citlaltonac* aurait engendré Quetzalcoatl (2).

Enfin, le Codex Tellerianus ajoute que le pénitent (Quetzalcohuatl), trompé par Tezcatlipoca était le même qui naquit de la vierge appelée Chimalma, au ciel *Chalchivitzli* dont le nom a été traduit par « pierre précieuse de la pénitence ou du Sacrifice. » Il se sauva du déluge et naquit sous le signe *Chicnahuiecatl* ou 9 vent. (3).

Remarquons que dans les divers passages par nous cités, les deux Quetzalcohuas semblent parfois plus ou moins confondus, mais le fait d'une naissance virginale attribuée au moins à l'un d'entre eux paraît suffisamment établi.

Peut-être s'étonnera-t-on de voir une déité d'origine Toltèque-Orientale assimilée sur ce point à un dieu tel qu'Huitzilopochtli, le dieu national des Mexicas, mais il n'est pas douteux pour nous que ce n'est qu'après avoir été admis dans l'olympé des Toltèques-Occidentaux que Quetzalcohuatl a pu être substitué au Mars Mexicain. Jamais, le premier des personnages de ce nom, le héros

(1) M. E. Beauvois, *Deux sources de l'histoire des Quetzalcoatl* ; pp. 435 et suiv. du *Muséon*, tome V ; (Louvain 1886).

(2) *Ibid.*, *ibid.* ; p. 441.

(3) *Ibid.*, *ibid.* ; p. 600.

civilisateur des Ulmèques et des Xicalanques ne paraît avoir été considéré comme l'enfant d'une vierge,

Du reste, toute l'histoire du second Quetzalcohuatl offre des traces de remaniements postérieurs. Les annalistes qui nous l'ont transmise se trouvent rarement d'accord entre eux. Le seul point sur lequel ils sont à peu près du même avis, c'est sur le nom de la mère de ce personnage qui s'appelait soit *Chimalman*, « la main du bouclier », soit *Chimalna*, « la mère du bouclier. » Pour tout le reste, ils diffèrent grandement ainsi que l'on va pouvoir en juger.

Le Codex Chimalpopoca fait de cette dernière, une reine d'un pays de *Hwitznachuac*, litt. « Vers les Nahoas méridionaux » placé par l'abbé Brasseur, au sud du Popocatépetl, en dehors de la vallée d'Anahuac. Ce document nous rapporte que le prince envahisseur *Totépeuh-Nonohualcatl* également désigné sous le nom de Mixcohua-Camaxtli l'épousa après l'avoir vaincue et la rendit mère de Quetzalcohuatl, mais il ne nous la donne nullement comme vierge, ainsi que les documents précédents (1).

Nous voyons que les diverses légendes ne concordent guère en ce qui concerne le père soit réel, soit putatif de notre héros, les uns parlent de Camaxtli ou Totépeuh, les autres de Tonacateuctli ou Citlaltonac. Une tradition citée par Mendieta et dont le caractère semble, dans une certaine mesure, ethnographique, fait descendre Quetzalcoatl d'un vieillard habitant le pays de Chicomoztoc ou des « sept cavernes » qui s'appelait *Iztac-mixcohuatl*, litt. « la blanche couleuvre nébuleuse. » D'une première épouse appelée *Ilancueitl*. litt.

(1) Codex Chimalpopoca, *apud* Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Hist. des nat. civil.*, t. I, liv. 2, chap. 3, p. 236 et 237.

« vieux jupon, » il aurait eu six fils qui furent Xelhua, Tenuch, Ulmecatl, Xicalancatl, Mixtecatl et Otomitl. Sa seconde femme ne lui aurait donné qu'un enfant, lequel fut Quetzalcoatl (1).

Plusieurs des personnages ici mentionnés portent visiblement des noms de nations, telles que celles des Othomies, des Xicalanques, des Ulmèques. Nous verrons plus loin que le terme de Chicomoztoc désignait une région située bien éloignée du plateau d'Anahuac. Le sens de la légende est, du reste, facile à saisir. Elle veut dire simplement que les nations civilisées de la nouvelle Espagne où plutôt que les civilisations de ce pays avaient leur berceau dans les contrées du nord-ouest. Après tout, il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce que les dévôts de Quetzalcoatl aient attribué à ce personnage mythique ce qui primitivement était appliqué à Huitzilopochtli ou même à quelqu'autre divinité. Ne voyons-nous pas par exemple les musulmans de l'Arabie et de la Perse désigner du nom de *Bethoul* ou « vierge, » Fathma, la fille de Mohammed, parce que telle est l'épithète dont les chrétiens de Syrie font usage pour désigner la mère du Christ (2), les *Gaures* ou Parsis confondre leur prophète Zoroastre avec le patriarche Abraham que leur ont fait connaître les lecteurs de la Bible (3). Enfin, on sait l'abondante infiltration d'idées chrétiennes qui, dès les premiers siècles de notre ère, se produisit chez les Bouddhistes (4).

(1) Mendieta, *Hist. ecclesiast. indiana*, lib. 2<sup>e</sup>, cap. XXXIII, p. 145.

(2) A. Chodzko, *Théâtre Persan, choix de Téazis*, mystère III<sup>e</sup>, p. 74, (en note), de la *Bibliothèque Orientale Elzévirienne*, (Paris 1878).

(3) Tavernier, *voyages*, etc. tome II; liv. 4<sup>e</sup>; chap. VIII; p. 95 et 96, (Rouen 1724). — *Les traditions relatives au fils de la Vierge*, p. 948 du tome IV (nouvelle série) des *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, (Paris 1881).

(4) *Les tradit. relat. au fils de la Vierge*, *ibid.*, p. 917. — Abbé

Pour en finir avec les traditions relatives au fils de la Vierge en Amérique, Mendieta affirme que Barthélémy de la Casas les retrouva également au Yucatan, ainsi qu'en ferait foi une apologie écrite de la main de ce dernier personnage et conservée au couvent de Saint-Dominique à Mexico.

Un clerc respectable et d'âge mûr chargé par l'évêque de Chiapas, d'évangéliser la péninsule Yucatèque lui aurait appris que, d'après une conversation qu'il avait eu avec un chef de ce pays, les indiens même païens croyaient au dogme de la Trinité. Ils reconnaissaient un Dieu Père, créateur de toutes choses appelé *Izona*. Son fils, appelé *Bacab* naquit d'une Vierge du nom de *Chibirias*. Cette dernière avait pour mère, la déesse *Ixchel*. Quant à l'Esprit-Saint, ces peuples l'auraient connu sous le nom d'*Echuah*. Quoi qu'il en soit, les Yucatèques affirmaient que *Bacab* aurait été mis à mort par un certain *Eopuco*, lequel le fit ~~se~~ aller, lui mit une couronne d'épines sur la tête et l'attacha les bras étendus à un pieu. Toutefois *Bacab* serait ressuscité le troisième jour après son trépas pour remonter au ciel où il résiderait auprès de son père. C'est alors qu'*Echuah* arriva sur terre pour donner aux hommes ce qui leur était nécessaire. Interrogé sur le sens de ces diverses dénominations, l'indien aurait répondu que *Izona* voulait dire « le grand père, » *Bacab*, « le fils du grand père » et *Echuah* « marchand ». D'ailleurs, ajoute-t-il, tout ce que je viens de vous exposer nous est connu par un enseignement que les habitants de ce pays se transmettent de père en fils (1).

Roussel, *l'Incarnation d'après le Bhâgavata Purana*, p. 90 et suiv. de la 2<sup>e</sup> section (sciences religieuses) du compte-rendu du Congrès Scientifique international des catholiques, (Paris 1891).

(1) Mendieta, *Hist. eccles. indiana*, lib. 4<sup>e</sup> cap. XLI; p. 536 et 537.

Nous aurions beaucoup de peine à regarder cette tradition comme authentique. Si les croyances des Yucatèques s'étaient autant rapprochées du christianisme, comment se fait-il que Landa, si au fait des choses de la Péninsule, n'en ait soufflé mot ? Ce qui nous paraîtrait le plus vraisemblable, c'est que le clerc de l'évêque de Chiapas aura été induit en erreur par un indien déjà initié aux croyances chrétiennes et qui aura forgé tout un roman relativement aux traditions de ses aïeux. En tout cas, Bacab ne signifie pas du tout « fils » en Maya. Peut-être est-ce un composé de la racine *Bac*, « Répandre » et de l'affixe posses. *cab* ; litt. « celui qui répand, qui fait répandre. » Le nom de *Bacabs* était affecté aux quatre grands Dieux chargés de soutenir la voûte céleste, ainsi qu'aux vases à tête d'animaux renfermant les entrailles des défunts. *Chiribias* ne saurait être un mot de la langue du Yucatan, puisque la lettre *R* n'existe pas dans cet idiome. *Echuah* est visiblement pour *Ek chuah*, nom du dieu protecteur des marchands et voyageurs (1). *Izona* ne serait-il pas une forme incorrecte pour *Itzamna* ou *Ylzanma* ou même *Zamna*, héros et demi-dieu civilisateur de la péninsule Yucatèque ? C'est même à lui que l'on attribue l'invention des caractères calculiformes (2). Quant à *Ixchel* ou *Ixcheel* dont le sens est peut-être celui d'une sorte d'oiseau bleu femelle, on l'invoquait spécialement dans les accouchements en qualité de déesse de la médecine (3).

Comte de CHARENCEY.

(1) D. de Landa, *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, trad. de l'abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, § XXVII ; p. 159.

(2) Beltran, *Arte del idioma Maya*, p. 16 (Merida de Yucatan, 1859).

(3) *Relac. de las cosas de Yucatan*, § XXXII, p. 125. — Manuscrit Troano, t. 2<sup>e</sup>, articles *Ekchuah*, *Itzamna*, etc., *Etudes sur le système graphique des Mayas*, par l'abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, (Paris 1870).

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